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DIVER

APRIL 2015

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STEVE WEINMAN, EDITOR

FIRST IN



THE GIDDY LINE MIDWAY

"OUR INTEREST'S ON THE DANGEROUS EDGE OF THINGS," wrote Robert Browning, going on to talk about what he called "the giddy line midway". Browning may not have been a diver, but these poets know a thing or two.

Our writers are getting a bit edgy in this April issue, which does after all mark the line between UK divers' winter and active summer months.

Gavin Parsons has been diving in El Hierro, the furthest-flung Canary Island and once regarded as marking the frontier of the Old World. Long after continental sailors realised that their ships would not plunge into space if they crossed the line, the island still marked their international dateline – until Greenwich usurped it. Having been there, I reckon it still retains a bit of a frontier feel (El Hierro, that is, not Greenwich).

We're edgy in another sense, however, in that some of the pleasant underwater experiences described this month are tempered by darker reality checks. Take Nigel Wade, a sunny soul looking to enjoy the diving around the island of St Vincent in the southern Caribbean – until, that is, a dive-centre theft, net-fishing a stone's throw from the resort and savage treatment of a whale shark cast a shadow over the smiles.

THEY WITNESSED THE DAMAGE ONE WINTER'S STORMS COULD WREAK

No whale sharks were harmed, as far as we know, during Andrey Nekrasov's snorkelling encounters in southern Cebu in the Philippines, but he does remember the proceedings as something of a free-for-all circus on the part of the spectators. The experience highlights the tightrope we walk between wanting to interact with and capture images of such big animals, and risking compromising their welfare.

After reading the article I spoke to Philippines dive specialists who assured me that this particular man/shark interface has recently become far better regulated, and I trust that this is the case.

Still with sharks, Melissa Hobson was knocked out by the wild diving with raggies and the like at Aliwal Shoal in South Africa, but when another diver on the boat came up too fast, the ensuing experience in rough seas tipped over into something even more dramatic.

We're reminded of the power of the sea again by John Williams' account of a UK wreck he and his wife were lucky enough to enjoy diving almost exclusively for years – until the day they witnessed the damage one winter's storms could wreak on a 20m trawler.

A much bigger vessel, the cruiser *Cesare Rossarol*, fell victim not to weather but to a mine off Croatia, tragically mere days after the end of the Great War, so it effectively slid just beyond the brink of safety. An international team of divers have been surveying this impressive three-part wreck.

Meanwhile, our *Deep Breath* column projects us scarily far over the edge of acceptability, but with the issue of bestiality with sea creatures being thrust into focus with a film and a book it needs to be faced clearly and calmly – which is what I think Tim Ecott has done.

But back to diving as we know it: for the start of the UK diving season we asked South Coast specialist Will Appleyard to select some sites suitable for the gentle easing of bodies back into the briny. Nothing edgy here – easy does it!



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CONTENTS

FEATURES



25 Here's to the 2015 Season!
Will Appleyard picks out five South Coast dive-sites



31 Edge of the Old World
Gavin Parsons has been diving El Hierro in the Canaries

36 Just for Starters
A winning portfolio of images from Sue Guess



38 Dangers and Delights
Unexpected incident while shark-diving at Aliwal Shoal

44 Be the Champ!
Alex Mustard gets to grips with grouper shots



48 Good, Bad and Ugly
Nigel Wade gets mixed messages in St Vincent

57 Sea Monsters
Myth meets reality in the world of the giant octopuses

60 Death of a Viking Princess
It's good to have a pet wreck, but all good things…



66 Good-Tempered Giants
Reflections on a whale shark encounter in Cebu



72 Project Rossarol
Expedition to dive an Italian cruiser wreck off Croatia

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incorporating UNDERWATER WORLD

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CONTENTS

REGULARS

3 **First In**
Editor's view

8 **Off-Gassing**
Pioneer shark-wrangling and other letters

10 **News**
Illegal fishing tackled and a new wreck created

23 **Beachcomber**
When diving just isn't worth the effort

55 **Trewavas**
The imitation game – masters of disguise

63 **Behind the Scenes**
Monty Halls on rescues, gallantry and awards

77 **Book Reviews**
Buoyancy, pirates, records and Antarctic diving

80 **Booking Now**
All the holiday news

82 **Diver Tests**
BC, dive-bag, fins and gloves in the spotlight

88 **Just Surfaced**
New but untested diving products

90 **Dive Holiday Directory**

92 **Liveaboard Directory**

94 **Classified Ads**

96 **Dive Centre Directory**

96 **Advertisers' Index**

97 **Subscribe Here**
– and get a free Apeks diving watch!

98 **Deep Breath**
The man who loved dolphins too much


10


80


82


88



Cover shot:
Caribbean diver,
by Nigel Wade

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WAS YOUNG STUART COVE REALLY THE TI-PIONEER?

For me, the March issue of DIVER was a real treat – the stunning photography, the heart-warming story of Trevor Bankhead's selfless and sensitive act of recovering the body of Euan Goddard from Durham's River Wear to hasten closure for his family. Even a trip report from Oman, my favourite diving destination.

Then there were the sharks. Having read John Bantin's excellent article highlighting the benefit to conservation of shark-baiting, I am not quite so steadfast in my objection.

He concedes the dangers; even the protection of chain-mail offers no guarantee against injury – although he didn't mention that there has been at least one fatality, on a Jim Abernathy trip running out of Florida. However, the implication that Stuart Cove discovered tonic immobility (TI) as a consequence of beer-fuelled dares piqued my interest.

TI is used by lots of different animals to fake death and avoid attack. It seems out of place for an apex predator but, because shark courtship is not a gentle affair, perhaps inducing TI in the female is her best chance of escaping injury.

The orca has cottoned on to the sharks' apparent Achilles' heel. In 1997, a female orca was filmed just off the Farallon Islands, close to the Californian coast, inverting a great white to induce TI before holding it motionless until it drowned.

Around New Zealand, orcas have learned to take sting rays while swimming upside down, before quickly righting themselves to safely immobilise their prey by sending them into TI.

Back to Stuart Cove. It took only a few clicks to discover an article by Adam Higginbotham (*The Shark Whisperer, Daily Telegraph*, 24 December, 2004) suggesting that a rather terrified Cove learned his shark-wrangling skills in 1980 on the set of the Bond movie *For Your Eyes Only*.

And that these skills had apparently been developed when marine co-ordinators and stuntmen were filming *Thunderball* in 1965, the last time a Bond movie was filmed in the Bahamas – when Cove was barely older than a toddler.

Besides, I quickly tracked down scientific papers published in the 1980s describing TI in sharks, and marine biologists were probably aware of TI long before this.

Cove probably didn't discover TI, but it adds to the folklore that seems to gravitate towards successful people. More likely, it was observed in Nature first and wranglers or biologists replicated it. No matter, TI provides a relatively safe way of handling and studying these beautiful creatures and hopefully research (some of which was highlighted in the same issue of DIVER) will lead to better protection, which can only benefit the health of the oceans.

MIKE FOLLOWS, SUTTON COLDFIELD

***John Bantin comments:** If you read the chapter of my book Amazing Diving Stories entitled "Tonic Immobility" you will understand how Stuart Cove (inset) got his reputation as a shark wrangler to Hollywood on the set of the said Bond movie when he single-handedly rounded up a tiger shark in the ocean that had escaped from the filming area. He was undoubtedly a young man at the time, but he certainly was not at all terrified!*



JOHN BANTIN

Two sides to travel

As a subscriber to DIVER for a number of years, I noted that blue o two had been given awards by the magazine, and decided to book a liveaboard holiday with the company on this basis.

I booked through Will on 22 May, 2014, but when six days later I had received no airline tickets or insurance details I telephoned the blue o two office and explained the situation to Stuart.

He agreed to look into the matter and said he would phone me before the office closed at 5.30. No call came, so I phoned back at 5.45 and left a message.

Stuart hadn't called by 10 the next morning, so I called and spoke to James. He had listened to my message but had not acted on my request for a call back, as he didn't think it necessary.

I was due to leave from Gatwick the next day, so I thought it was necessary, and that blue o two's customer service was very poor.

When I eventually received the tickets, the carrier was given as First Aviation. I could have wandered around Gatwick all day, as there is no such company at the airport!

Also, Will had failed to inform me when I booked that I would be the only recreational diver on the boat, as the others were all technical divers.

Not only that, but I was charged an additional £46 when I made the booking.

I wrote to blue o two Director Jason Strickland on 24 June, but received no reply. I emailed on 9 August and again on 26 August, as well as making at least three phone calls to the office.

It was not until 4 September that I received an email reply from Jason Strickland. I emailed him again on 10 September because I considered that his company had shown utter disregard for customer service. Once again I heard nothing, and posted him a copy of my email on 14 October.

On 12 November Jason Strickland emailed to state that: "The less than perfect communications is not grounds for financial compensation." I sent a further email to him on 27 November and am still awaiting a reply in January.

I think this lack of response shows what blue o two thinks of its customers. From my experience, the company does not live up to the awards it has received from DIVER.

MELVYN BLUCK, GREAT BOOKHAM, SURREY

***Comment:** Mr Bluck says that he chose to book his holiday with blue o two on the basis of the DIVER Awards, and we would confirm that any reader is wise to do so. The Tour Operator of the Year and Liveaboard of the Year Awards, in which blue o two regularly excels, are conferred purely on the basis of mass reader votes, suggesting that winners' customer service is generally highly regarded.*

We asked Jason Strickland of blue o two to comment on Mr Bluck's specific complaints: "I have reviewed the initial call that Mr Bluck said was not returned – Stuart actually said that he would try to get back to him by 5.30, but didn't specify that he would phone, and in fact emailed the documents shortly after that time, understandably assuming that it would be unnecessary to phone as well.

"Monarch was not specified on the flight tickets – though in fact that has since been changed – but no customers had taken issue with this before, as they would simply check the flight number, departure time and destination on the board at the airport.

"There was no overcharging on Mr Bluck's insurance policy as he claimed, and we long ago supplied him with documentation from the insurer to prove this. Finally, I'm afraid it's not usual and would not be practical to find out and inform customers of the qualifications and types of diving that others on a trip plan to carry out.

"Such complaints are rare and we're sorry Mr Bluck found so many points to dispute about his £640 seven-day trip to the Red Sea. However, we stand by our original statement to him that they do not constitute grounds for compensation."

Saved or been saved?

Have any DIVER readers ever saved a person's life? Has somebody ever saved your life? Do you have a life-saving story to share?

The Garden Productions, the team behind the

Don't return empty-handed

There is a lot of talk going around at the moment regarding the ocean being full of rubbish such as bottles and plastic bags.

While on holiday in Hurghada recently, I and two other divers, Anthony and Neil, volunteered to help clean up the area immediately in front of the dive centre, because we had noticed that during our dives the level of rubbish seemed to be getting worse.

IDIVE Makadi Bay kindly donated the tanks of air and we were surprised to be able to fill one and a half mesh bags each during a 65-minute dive.

On our previous dives we had come across a loggerhead turtle, and 10m away from the turtle there was a large sheet of polythene which, as most divers know, turtles confuse with jellyfish.

As keen divers, we hope that by our actions we have helped to save at least one turtle's life. We also hope that other divers reading this will help to keep our oceans clean and free of rubbish, even if it is by collecting just one plastic bottle that has been discarded.

Our ocean life is precious, and if we want to protect the wild life for future generations we must all do our bit, however small it may be.

We would like to thank IDIVE Makadi Bay for kindly donating the tanks of air to enable us to do our bit for Project AWARE.

GIRVAN BARNES, CHATTERIS, CAMBS



television series *24 Hours in A&E*, is looking for remarkable, brave and inspirational stories of Britons who have saved the lives of others in the face of danger and tragedy.

We'd love to hear from the people whose quick-thinking, bravery and selflessness made the difference between life and death.

The Garden is looking to speak to anyone who believes they saved a stranger's life, or anybody who believes their life was saved by a stranger who would be happy to share his or her story and might consider being in a documentary.

It doesn't matter what the story is or where the experience took place, and it doesn't matter whether the two people have never seen each other since that day.

If you think you have a story to tell, please do get in touch. Call 0207 620 6725, or email me at deborah.brougham@thegardenproductions.tv

DEBORAH BROUGHAM, LONDON

Short but sweet

Monty Halls asked for submissions of farewell poems for divers ('*We As Divers Have No Eulogy*', March), so I had a go. The cadence is supposed to represent breathing through a regulator:

Unencumbered,
Slipping into
An ocean of memories

A particle suspended,
Held in solution,
In the infinite blue.

In my element,
A world unfamiliar
To those I leave behind.

ALASTAIR THORLEY

Got something diving-related you'd care to share? Email **steve@divermag.co.uk**, including your name and postal address – and please confirm that you're writing exclusively to DIVER



Indonesians set firm example in enforcing marine-reserve laws

DIVERS HAVE A NEW underwater attraction after a large Vietnamese fishing-boat caught operating illegally in Indonesian waters was sunk in February in southern Raja Ampat, West Papua.

Locals spotted the 55-tonne boat setting a large gill-net in the area in mid-January. Police intercepted and impounded it.

They found more than 2 tonnes of shark-fins and some 80 hawksbill sea turtles, a critically endangered species, aboard. Flesh from about half a dozen manta rays was also seized.

Indonesian marine protected areas date back eight years and, for the Raja Ampat archipelago, the government introduced a law protecting all species of shark and ray over an area of 17,760 square miles in February 2013.

The move came in response to persistent heavy fishing of sharks by foreign vessels, which had led to a serious fall in populations. The Government promised that it would police the law aggressively.

Even as the February sinking went ahead, two more boats, this time from Sulawesi, were being seized for allegedly fishing illegally in northern Raja Ampat. Rangers and water police were reported to have caught the fishermen using homemade explosives on the reefs of Sayang Island, in the Wayag marine park.

As with the other capture, crew-members were arrested and jailed, pending charges. As **DIVER** went to press, plans were being finalised for sinking the vessels, though it was not confirmed how this would be done.

During late 2014, six other foreign boats impounded for fishing violations in Indonesian waters were sunk, but not as diving attractions and artificial reefs. They were burned and fired on by the navy.

Raja Ampat's blanket ban on fisheries and effective policing of the law has led to a visibly improved marine environment, according to Dr Mark Erdmann, Vice President of Conservation International's Asia-Pacific Marine Programs.

He said there had been "a significantly increased recovery of sharks… such that on almost any given dive you will now see at least a few reef sharks" and that divers now see "lots of baby sharks in the shallows and manta rays are very much thriving". ■

Kate braves icy water for conservation



TERRY SCOTT

Kate Steels-Fryatt sets off on her Ice Mile.



A HARDY SWIMMER has raised money for the marine conservation support organisation Sea-Changers by completing an "Ice Mile" – swimming in water of less than 5°C without a protective wetsuit.

Kate Steels-Fryatt, 45, from Bishops Waltham, completed her swim in swim-suit, hat and goggles at Andark Diving and Watersport's training lake near Southampton at the end of January. She became only the 110th person to swim an Ice Mile, administered by the International Ice Swimming Association.

Steels-Fryatt, who is a PADI Divemaster and BSAC Advanced Diver, said that, having woken up "to a dusting of snow and a howling bitter northerly wind", she "just focused on the swim". She had trained hard by swimming in local rivers, the sea and at Andark Lake on five days a week over two months.

Even so, it was "incredibly tough and took so much out of me". Temperatures were 3.9° in the water and -1° out of it, with wind chill.

Steels-Fryatt completed 1650m (rules require a minimum of 1609.3m) in just under 33 minutes, backed by the support team from Andark who "helped me to get changed into lots of layers of warm clothing and to recover – once I started shivering and shaking they knew I was starting to warm up…"

As **DIVER** went to press Steels-Fryatt, an open-water and winter swimmer for several years, was due to compete for Great Britain in the inaugural Ice Swimming World Championships in Murmansk, Russia in March. A 25m pool was to be cut into a frozen lake, competitors racing over 1km (40 lengths) in water of around 0°, with outside air temperature as low as minus 15°.

Steels-Fryatt came second in last year's Winter Swimming in Springs Festival in Jinan, Eastern China. Earlier this year she took another two second places in the UK Cold Water Winter Swimming Championships, a breast-stroke sprint event, and in an endurance event at the annual Parliament Hill Ice Swimming "Hootenanny".

Sea-Changers (www.sea-changers.org.uk) raises funds for British marine conservation projects. Donations in relation to Steels-Fryatt's Andark swim can still be made at uk.virginmoneygiving.com/KateSteelsFryatt ■

MASS WHALE STRANDING IN NEW ZEALAND

SOME 200 PILOT WHALES stranded and 140 died in Golden Bay on New Zealand's South Island in early February, at a spot known for trapping the animals in its extensive shallows.

The rest were watered and covered before being helped off and into deeper water on a high tide by conservation workers and volunteers.

However, while it was hoped that they would clear the coast successfully, it was possible that they might return and strand again, as had happened with whales in the past.

"It's very sad – they're very intelligent animals," the area's Department of Conservation Manager Andrew Lamason told press. "The pragmatic view is that it's part of nature." He added that it was difficult to know what to do with the mass of carcasses.

Burial on beaches with the help of diggers is a traditional option but, said Lamason, his department was considering towing the carcasses into deeper water and tethering them. They could then nourish other marine life as they decomposed. ■

Government pull-back alarms conservationists

OF 37 POTENTIAL marine conservation zones (MCZs) recommended by Government advisors, only 23 have made the list for the second consultation round, which was launched on 30 January.

Twenty-seven MCZs were designated by DEFRA in November 2013, but the latest move represents yet a further reduction to the Government's original target of 127 MCZs for England outlined two years ago.

This will leave English waters "woefully under-protected", said the Marine Conservation Society (MCS).

"We are alarmed that these proposed MCZs have been shelved, at least for the time being," said Dr Peter Richardson, MCS Biodiversity and Fisheries Programme Manager. "We believe all of the sites are necessary to achieve the Government's stated commitment to deliver a full network."

Examples of proposed areas that have been dropped, or at least suspended, are Studland, Bembridge, Norris to Ryde and Yarmouth to Cowes, with creatures at risk including spiny seahorses, mantis shrimps and large seagrass meadows.

Included among the 23 proposals remaining are Cromer Shoals chalk beds; Farnes East, where sealife includes sea pens; and Newquay and the Gannel, known for crawfish, pink seafans and migrating eels and salmon.

To take part in the second public consultation on MCZs, go to www.mcsuk.org/mpa where progress on marine protected areas (MPAs) around Britain, of which English MCZs are a part, can also be viewed. ■

LIFEBOATMAN'S RING FOUND – SIX YEARS AFTER LOSS



PAUL FENNER

The Weymouth lifeboat, aboard which Mark Thorne crewed and near which his wedding ring was lost.

A LIFEBOATMAN WHO USED scuba gear to search for his lost wedding ring as well as making low-tide foreshore searches where he had dropped it has been reunited with the item – after a mate found the ring six years later.

Mark Thorne, who in 2009 crewed aboard Dorset's Weymouth lifeboat, lost the platinum ring while going aboard for a call-out.

After the searches, which included hiring a person with a metal detector, he had given up hope of recovering it.

This February a friend, Steve Woolford, was near the site at low tide and, remembering the loss, thought he'd have a quick look.

He could hardly believe it when, having descended a harbour wall ladder on to the foreshore, he almost immediately spotted the ring lying among the rocks and shingle a metre from the wall. Somehow, the ring had resisted being buried or washed away for all that time.

Thorne told press he was "really, really chuffed" to get the ring back. Woolford was looking forward to the recipient buying him a beer. ■

THE BIG QUESTION

Paper or pixel?

Here was a question that gave rise to an especially enthusiastic response: "Do you log your dives digitally?" The simple answer is that 58% of you do, but it was clear from the comments that a large proportion of digital divers also keep some sort of paper records, whether for old time's sake, convenience or – commonly – through distrust of digital media's permanence. We'll be following this one up!

NO

"I download them but don't fill in the details. My paper logbook is my primary dependable logbook." Sue Brown

" I would if there was a common app used." Ryan Tuck

"Easiest to prove on paper." Dave Lambert

"More useful to have them to hand on a dive-site to check weights, suit thicknesses etc for similar dives." Matthew Johnston

"Call me traditional, but I like a logbook I can carry with me and write up at the dive-site. Good bedtime reading, too." Duncan Raynor

"I would but all software that I have found so far does not allow the username use of more than one dive computer." Andrew Duff

"Would do if it was a one-stop process!" Marion McFarlane

"I would love to digitise my older logs and will probably do so when I buy my next dive computer with more modern software." Chris Broster

"Digital things crash and die. Paper logbooks are for life." Debbie Evans

"I prefer to have my dives in a logbook for easier reference." Avril Keith

"I love nothing more then filling in my logbook with fellow-divers in the local cafe or pub discussing the dive and having a laugh and talking about each other's dives." Thomas Staples

YES

"Mostly so I can send them on to DAN Research." Patrick Wadsworth

"It's great to look back and see the graphs of all my near-death experiences." Paul Smith

"It is always good to have a digital backup for when the analogue memory fails." Jay Benson

"I still log all my dives both digitally and on paper. Granted, the written log may be brief: X metres for Y time, vis was Z." Paul Jackson

"I write them in my logbook during diving and when I download my dive computer I transfer it all to the computer as well. Useful when lecturing to trainees about deco as I can show them real dive profiles." Diane Gan

"Helps to see the nitrogen loading over a dive series." Alastair McCulloch

"But I always keep a hard copy as it's easy for digital copies to be lost due to broken computers. Painful personal experience!" Tony Fetigan

"Useful to print a profile and calculate air consumption to see progress." Denise Major

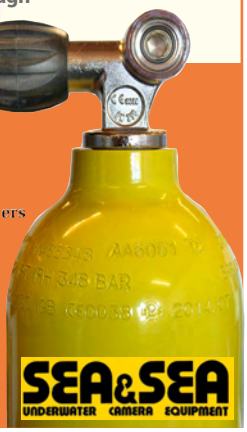
"It's ideal for looking back at dives you have done and can see depth progression and buoyancy control on profiles." Andrew Cavill

"Scubapro Uwatec SmartTrak enables you to analyse your dives to death if you wish. Logbook pages can be printed to the handy A6 size. After 100 dives I make up a logbook." Keith Waugh

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THE NEXT BIG QUESTION

Do you take out specialist diving insurance when you dive overseas?

Answer yes or no, and feel free to comment

British try-diver dies in Whitsunday Islands…

A 23-YEAR-OLD British woman has died while diving under instruction off Hayman Island in Australia's Whitsunday Islands.

As **DIVER** went to press, information was sparse. Neither the woman nor the company or individual in whose care she was diving had been named. A post-mortem result had yet to be announced, along with news of any investigation by operational assessors.

However, Australian press reported that the woman was undertaking "an introductory dive lesson", having arrived with friends in Blue Pearl Bay aboard a dive-boat.

She was submerged with an instructor and an unspecified number of other divers when, according to a police spokesman, the group lost sight of her.

An emergency call was put out and a rescue helicopter flew to the scene, by which time the woman had been found, though whether under water or at the surface was not reported.

Despite emergency treatment, the woman never regained consciousness.

…as inquest examines another diver's disappearance off Victoria coast

AN AUSTRALIAN DIVER who disappeared off Port Phillip Heads, Victoria in July 2012 may have been bitten by sharks, but not before she had died, a coroner has heard.

The body of Karen Lee, 32, was never found but her weightbelt and BC with cylinder were. A shark expert told the inquest that the gear had damage "inflicted by one or more sharks" in places that implied that bites occurred after the equipment was on the seabed, in a position consistent with the diver settling there on her back.

"I am satisfied she succumbed to marine life only after she drowned," said the coroner.

Lee's dive buddy, who had dived with her on nine previous occasions, told the inquest that she had exhibited difficulties in buoyancy control.

On the fateful dive, he had surfaced to raise the alarm after the pair lost contact during their ascent.

Lee's cylinder was found to contain no air and, while a freeflow may have occurred, it was possible that she had run out of air during her ascent and sunk, the inquest heard. The coroner described it as "concerning" that Lee had not dropped her weights "to bring her to the surface quickly".

Though not stated in coverage of the inquest, the prospect of Lee having succeeded in ditching her weightbelt and/or BC was presumably discounted on account of a body never being found at the surface.

However, neither did Australian press report any statement addressing how Lee could have become neatly separated from both her BC and weightbelt after death.

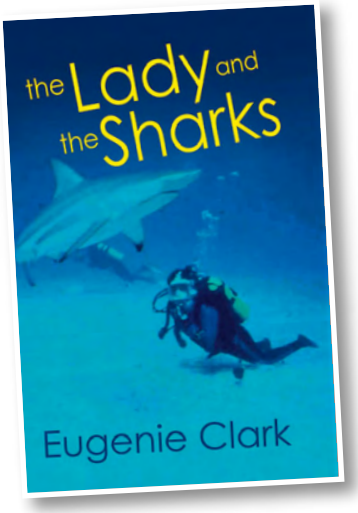
Philippines assesses its diving services

THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION on Sports Scuba Diving is in the "final stages" of research into how the country's sports diving industry can be "more efficient and in tune with the times", *Business World Online* in Manila has reported.

There has been a public consultation with stakeholders on how to "better the conduct of scuba-diving as an outdoor sporting activity in line with the country's thrust to make it a key tourism product as identified in the National Tourism Development Plan", it said.

Elements include "stronger regulation of dive establishments that are not conforming to mandatory accreditation, ways to improve the skill level of dive professionals in the country and implementation of efforts to bridge the lack of skilled manpower in the industry for it to be globally competitive".

Other issues to be assessed are "dive fees and requirements relating to health issues, information gaps and environment concerns".



FAREWELL TO A PIONEERING DIVER – THE SHARK LADY

AMERICAN EUGENIE CLARK, the marine biologist and diver who made it her mission to better educate the public about misunderstood sharks, died in late February, aged 92.

Spending the final part of her life in Sarasota, Florida, Clark, a non-smoker, succumbed to lung cancer.

Alongside a strong academic career, Clark, who became known as the "Shark Lady", was a prolific researcher, diving all over the world as well as using submersibles to research in deeper waters.

She recorded her work through papers, books, TV programmes and magazine articles, and was an in-demand public speaker.

Her research work was supported by bodies including the National Science Foundation, Smithsonian Institution, National Geographic Society and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Honours came from numerous bodies and in the naming of five species of fish.

With a PhD in zoology from New York University, Clark first worked with the Scripps Institute of Oceanography and later with the American Museum of Natural History, Marine Biological Laboratory and the Lerner Marine Laboratory.

In 1955 she founded Sarasota's Cape Haze Marine Laboratory (now Mote Marine Laboratory), and taught marine biology at the University of Maryland from 1968 to her retirement in 1992, when she remained a Maryland senior research scientist and professor emeriti.

Clark was still diving aged 90. A further tribute will appear in next month's issue.

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Limpets latch onto world strength record

LIMPETS DISPLAY remarkable strength in attaching themselves to rocks or other surfaces, but also harbour the strongest natural material known to man – in their teeth, according to a recently published British study.

Relative to their mass, limpets' teeth have been found to be stronger even than spider's silk, previously thought to be the strongest biological material. And lessons gathered from their structure could help engineers design new hi-tech materials for use in manufacture.

The study, headed by Prof Asa Barber of University of Portsmouth's School of Engineering, used the common limpet (*Patella vulgate*), prevalent in western Europe. Its teeth are each less than 1mm long.


Professor Asa Barber.

Newly developed microscopy that can work at atomic level was used to test the strength of limpet tooth slices some 100 times thinner than a human hair.

Because limpets' teeth are curved, it was necessary to test extremely small samples so that it was the material rather than tooth shape that was being assessed.

Barber found a highly effective mix of protein and goethite, a hard


Much-magnified limpet teeth.

mineral made of fine nanofibres. Though a natural biological material, the composite is of a type that could be reproduced commercially in a case of "bioinspiration", where materials manufacture can be based on a design in nature.

"This discovery means that the fibrous structures found in limpet teeth could be mimicked and used in high-performance engineering applications such as Formula 1 racing cars, the hulls of boats and aircraft structures," said Barber.

The study's findings were published in the Royal Society journal *Interface* on 18 February.

Shark attacks: deaths fall in 2014

JUST THREE PEOPLE died worldwide as a result of incidents with sharks last year, compared with 10 in 2013 – even though the overall number of incidents was similar, at 72 compared with 2013's 75.

The latest annual statistics from The University of Florida's *International Shark Attack File*, which reflects attacks unprovoked by human interference, cite two of the deaths as having occurred in New South Wales, Australia, and the third in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Not one of last year's recorded bite incidents involved a scuba-diver. As usual, surfers and others in board sports were by far the most affected group, at 65% of incidents. Swimmers and waders were recorded at 32% and snorkellers 3%.

In line with long-term trends, the USA accounted for the highest number of bite incidents at 52, with more than half of these (28) occurring in eastern Florida. This, said the report, is due to the "high aquatic recreational utilisation of the county's long and attractive beaches and waters by both Florida residents and tourists, especially surfers, and to the rich nature of its marine fauna".

Other bites were recorded in Hawaii (seven), South Carolina (five), North Carolina (four) and California (four). Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas had one incident each.

Australia recorded 11 attacks – four in South Australia, three in New South Wales, two in Western Australia and one each in Queensland and Victoria.

This was slightly lower than its annual average of 12.5 over the past 10 years, and its two fatalities were in line with the annual average of 1.5 deaths over the same period.

South Africa had "a low-contact year" with just two attacks, under half its annual average of 4.3 for the past 10 years.

Despite this, its single fatality was roughly in line with its annual average of 1.3 over the decade – although fatal attacks have been up and down over the years with, for instance, none in 2008, four in 2009 and eight in 2010.

Overall, lower death rates reflect better access to medical care for traumatic injuries, as well as greater numbers of lifeguards on beaches and swimmers who know more about shark safety, says report compiler George Burgess. Yet last year's decline may also reflect fewer chance encounters, he added.

Taken over many decades, the new figures continue a steadily upward trend of bite incidents, even if the 2014 total was lower than the previous year and the lowest since 68 in 2009.

"In general… the number of worldwide unprovoked shark attacks has grown at a steady pace since 1900, with each decade having more attacks than the previous," says the report. "The numerical growth in shark interactions does not necessarily mean there is an increase in the rate of shark attacks," it adds.

"Rather, it most likely reflects the ever-increasing amount of time spent in the sea by humans, which increases the opportunities for interaction between the two affected parties."

On the other hand, as shark conservationists might point out, increasing numbers of people in the sea are perhaps countered by falling numbers of overfished sharks…

The report can be found at www.flmnh.ufl.edu

Honeymoon bride dies

AN AMERICAN COUPLE on their honeymoon in Mexico were struck by tragedy when the bride died as they scuba-dived.

Lindsey and John McFadden, from Minnesota, were diving off Cozumel when Lindsey, 31, described as an experienced diver, indicated that she wished to ascend. At the surface she said "I feel sick" before passing out in the arms of John, 51. Despite attempts by rescuers and medical staff, she never regained consciousness.

A post mortem found that McFadden had suffered an internal bleed in her liver.

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DAAN VERHOEVEN

UK freediving champions named

UK champions Mike Board and (*below*) Liv Philip.

MIKE BOARD AND LIV PHILIP have been announced as the 2014 men's and women's UK National Freediving Champions by the British Freediving Association.

Champions are selected on the basis of their performances during the year in six open-water and pool disciplines, in competitions at home and abroad.

For both Board and Philip, there were the AIDA Euro Cup in Kalamata, Greece and the AIDA Team World Championships in Cagliari, Sardinia.

Board's additional event was the Freedive Gili Pool Competition in Gili Indonesia, while Philip's were the Great Northern International Pool competition in Liverpool and the Mediterranean Freediving World Cup in Myrtos, Crete.

Top results from Board were: 7min 01sec in Static Apnea, 201m in Dynamic, 107m in Dynamic No Fins, 103m in Constant Weight, 56m in Constant Weight No Fins and 95m in Free Immersion.

Philip's best were 6min 05sec in STA, 142m in DYN, 116m in DNF 116m, 70m in CWT, 42m in CNF and 52m in FIM.

Board said that he had set the UK Men's Champion title as one of his goals to force himself to train in the pool and register some official results. "I had previously only done depth," he said. "This was also the reason that I went to the 2014 World Team Championships in Sardinia, to make me start training in Static and Dynamic Apnea.

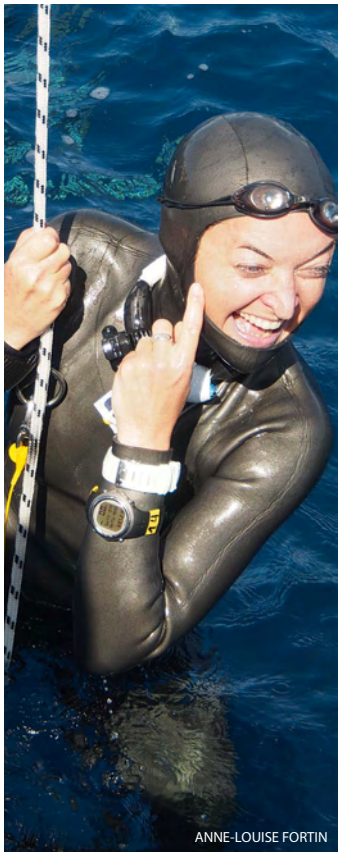
"I still prefer the depth disciplines but I can see the value of being a more all-round freediver, and strength in the pool does help in depth diving."

A goal for Board in 2015 is to improve his CNF performances, as "currently my technique takes me two steps forwards and one step back".

Philip said: "It has been a challenging year and I have not had as much time as I would have liked in the water. For this reason, the time I did have was all the more special.

"Being in the sea was wonderful and my deep diving is going from strength to strength.

"After winning the World Cup Circuit, I did a number of personal bests, culminating in my last dive of the season at the World Championships of 70m Constant Weight. This is the eighth successive year I have won the British Championship and my relationship to the sport has changed and developed over the years."



ANNE-LOUISE FORTIN

This year she hopes to "spend some time in the ocean, as this is what I love best", www.britishfreediving.org

SUSPENDED SENTENCE FOR REGS TUSSLE

A HAWAII FISHING DIVER who tore a scuba regulator from the mouth of an anti-aquarium fisheries activist has avoided a jail term, after reaching a plea bargain with prosecutors.

Conservationists and reef fishermen clashed off Hawaii's Kona coast in May last year when divers representing the campaigning group Sea Shepherd descended to take photographs of diving fishermen collecting reef fish for the aquarium industry.

Sea Shepherd disputed the Hawaii government's view that reef-fishing was sustainable given its system of permits and designated areas, seasons, fish sizes and catch quantities.

In about 15m of water, fisherman Jay Lovell finned over to activist Rene Umberger and pulled her regulator from her mouth. She replaced it before surfacing. The attack was caught on video by another Sea Shepherd diver.

Two months later, Lovell was charged with second-degree terroristic threatening, involving "*the intent to terrorise, or in reckless disregard of the risk of terrorising another person… did threaten by word or conduct to cause bodily injury*".

Umberger, Director of the coral reef conservation group For the Fishes and a coral-reef consultant for Humane Society International, described the charge as "appropriate".

This February Lovell pleaded guilty in court to the charge in return for a six-month suspended jail sentence and a year's probation, with terms including commitment to an anger-management programme.

Umberger continued to maintain, as she did last summer, that the incident was "terrifying and dangerous" and that a less-experienced diver "might well have died". She requested in court removal of Lovell's fishing licence during the sentence period, but was told by the judge that the terms of the plea agreement could not be altered.

NAS in Ireland

THE NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY Society has added the Irish Underwater Council, Comhairle Fo-Thuinn (CFT), as an NAS International Training Partner.

The CFT (www.diving.ie) is integrating NAS syllabuses into its diving and snorkelling training schemes in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

"Ireland has a vast array of submerged archaeological resources and these courses will provide a strong foundation and framework for the development of educational programming for those with a general interest in marine and underwater archaeology," says the NAS.

"It will also provide training for those who desire to volunteer on archaeological projects organised by state bodies and other organisations, both in Ireland and internationally. The courses may be of interest to non-divers."

Course information is available at www.diving.ie. CFT members can book there, while non-members need to email to info@diving.ie or call CFT on +353 1 284 4601.

In January, the NAS extended its already extensive International Training Partner collaborations in the USA, with the addition of the Maryland Maritime Archaeology Program, working with the Maryland Historical Trust.

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Good and bad news for great white sharks

A STUDY OF GREAT WHITE SHARKS in the western North Atlantic has indicated that they grow more slowly and mature much later than had been previously thought.

Findings suggest that males are sexually mature around age 26 and females around 33, much later than the previously accepted estimates of 4-10 years for males and 7-13 years for females.

The researchers revisited previous work in which band-like features in the sharks' vertebrae could, as in tree-ring technology, be used to calculate ages to which the creatures live.

The new work established how, in addition, rates of growth can be calculated from band patterns and, from differing rates through an individual's lifetime, when adolescence changes via sexual maturity to full adulthood.

Further, previous estimates of overall age expectancy were revised, the researchers establishing that band counts were reliable at estimating ages up to about 45 years but that thereafter the counts underestimated time-scale.

Their recalculations put ages as possibly exceeding 73 years in some individuals, putting great white sharks among the world's longest-lived fish.

But while longer lives are good news, the appreciably greater delay in reproductive activity established by the researchers implies increased vulnerability, due to the greater time required for population replacement.

Lead author of the study, published by Marine & Freshwater Research, was Lisa Natanson of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). Co-author was Greg Skomal of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries.

The NEFSC's Narragansett Laboratory in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, which holds a large collection of North Atlantic great white shark vertebrae, provided samples.

The study used 81 vertebral pieces collected between 1963 and 2010 from sharks captured or found dead.

✸ *As an antidote to regular claims of a falling global shark population because of excessive takes, line-fishermen on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia have said that the shark population in their region has increased, as a result of conservation measures limiting shark-fishing.*

Hauls of other fish are suffering, they say, as many get taken by sharks before they can be brought aboard.

BITE-BACK HEADS OFF ICELAND'S BLUE SHARKS

FROZEN-FOOD SPECIALIST Iceland has decided to de-list blue shark steaks from its new Food Warehouse stores, following discussions with Bite-Back, the UK's shark and marine conservation charity.

The near-threatened shark species had been trialled by Iceland but will no longer be sold once existing stocks have been cleared.

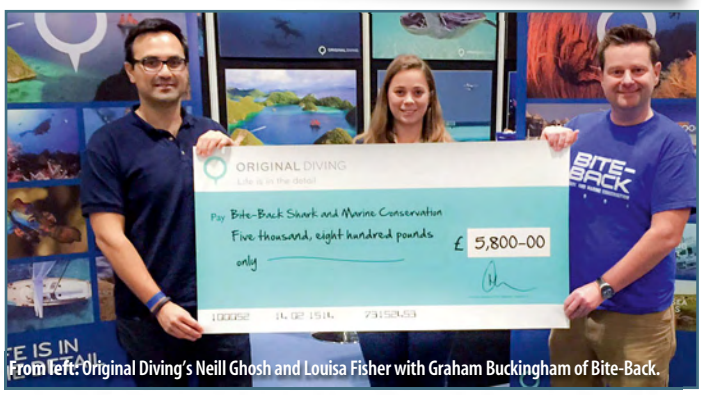
"This is another exciting victory for sharks and the oceans," said Bite-Back's Campaign Director Graham Buckingham. "Overfishing for sharks exists only because of over-consumption and that's why we can't tolerate any additional demand created by retailers and restaurants in the UK. Iceland is to be applauded for putting conservation before commerce and ending the sale of shark steaks."

Joint MD at Iceland Nigel Broadhurst said: "Iceland is grateful to Bite-Back for helping us arrive at a decision that is best for the oceans and our reputation as a first-class provider of quality frozen food."

Meanwhile dive-tour operator Original Diving has raised almost £6000 to help fund Bite-Back's Hacked Off! campaign to make Britain the first country in the world to ban sharkfin soup.

The sum accumulated over 18 months through voluntary donations from Original holiday-makers. Hacked Off! is said to have seen a 30% drop in the number of UK restaurants selling the dish, www.bite-back.com





From left: Original Diving's Neill Ghosh and Louisa Fisher with Graham Buckingham of Bite-Back.

Forgotten fonts found

A TYPOGRAPHIC FONTS production company has been able to recreate, as a digital facsimile, a legendary printing typeface of Doves Press – thanks to the recovery by divers of a long-lost metal typeface from London's River Thames.

The typeface pieces, based on drawings of a 15th-century design, were dumped from Hammersmith Bridge in the early 1900s because of a business dispute.

Port of London Authority divers searched for and found a number of the original typeface letters last November, at the behest of Typespec in Manchester. Where only drawings and printed materials were available before, with actual printing pieces in its possession the company has been able to optimise its digital font design, which went on sale recently.

Scots study out

WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY, the government's contracted marine archaeological assessor, has published online its 2014 report for the Scottish Atlantic Maritime Past: Heritage, Investigation, Research & Education (SAMPHIRE) project.

Covering the west coast, the study "enables local communities to engage with professional underwater archaeologists based in Scotland and aims to support the identification, investigation and appreciation of Scotland's marine heritage".

It wants to hear from those who have "seen, dived on or have any new information about unrecorded underwater archaeological sites".

SAMPHIRE concludes this year, blogs.wessexarch.co.uk/samphire/downloads

Camera workshop

THE GUILD OF TELEVISION Cameramen is holding a *Going to Extremes – Filming in Wet, Dry, Heat & Cold* workshop on 18 April at the National Film & Television School in Beaconsfield.

Featured are cameraman Gavin Newman, who has done a lot of underwater work, and Kevin Augello.

Divers are offered entry at a discounted rate of £40, and are asked to enter "DIVER" at booking website gtc-extremes.eventbrite.co.uk

Pressure builds for 'UK' mega-reserves

A **CAMPAIGN GROUP** of more than 100 conservation organisations and high-profile figures in academia, TV and film has called on the Government to designate marine protection areas (MPAs) around threeUK overseas territories: the Pacific's Pitcairn Islands and the Atlantic's Ascension Island and South Sandwich Islands.

If enacted, all three areas would add up to 700,000 square miles, almost doubling the world's total area of established MPAs.

The campaigning coalition is looking for a commitment from both the existing Government and opposition parties to a minimum of one MPA, in either the Pacific or the Atlantic, before the General Election on 7 May.

Well-known marine conservation groups active in the process include, in Britain, Greenpeace UK, the RSPB and the Blue Marine Foundation. Overseas organisations include the Pew Charitable Trusts and National Geographical Society.

Celebrities involved in the campaign include Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Gillian Anderson, Julie Christie and Helena Bonham-Carter.

"The UK government has the opportunity to take global leadership in marine conservation, increasing the amount of the world's ocean under full protection by 50%," the coalition states. "These waters are among the most diverse on Earth, with the British overseas territories housing 94% of the UK's unique biodiversity.

"If left unprotected, these fragile eco-systems face huge threats from overfishing, illegal pirate fishing, pollution and climate change."

In April 2010, just before that year's General Election, the Labour Government oversaw the designation of the Chagos archipelago, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, as an MPA, making it the world's largest protected area at 247,000sq miles.

However, controversy surrounded the designation, which appeared to rule out the return of island families moved off Chagos in the mid 1960s so that the USA could establish an air base there. The possibility of some resettlements is now being discussed.

Bearing all of this in mind, says this year's campaigning coalition, any stated intention to designate one or more MPAs in the Pacific and/or Atlantic would help boost the Government's reputation in the area of environmental conservation.

"No decisions have been taken about designating marine protected areas around Pitcairn or Ascension but we are working with both territory governments and other stakeholders to determine the feasibility of establishing MPA in these territories," said the Foreign Office.

No mention has yet been made of the South Sandwich islands, over which the UK claimed sovereignty in 1908. They are uninhabited and, with South Georgia, lie close to the Falkland Islands. Argentina claims sovereignty over all of the Falklands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

It established a naval base in the South Sandwich Islands in 1976 and, although Britain was alerted to the base in 1978 and tried to have it removed through diplomatic negotiation, it was left until 1982 when it was closed by force six days after the end of the Falklands War.

In referring to its considerations over Pitcairn and Ascension, the Government added that it "supports marine protected areas where they are scientifically justifiable and where an effective monitoring and enforcement regime can be established and funded".

To be effective, the MPAs would probably ban large-scale commercial fishing while allowing low-intensity fishing by local populations. Monitoring is now possible with satellite technology, a massive step forward from the almost impossible policing based on a handful of patrol boats, and far cheaper.

"Enforcing and monitoring these marine areas would be cost effective," said Charles Clover, Chair of the Blue Marine Foundation and the campaigning coalition's spokesman. "The Foreign Office is at a crossroads in dealing with overseas territories. It needs to recognise that we must deal with overfishing.

"We now have the technological ability to do this without boats and it is much cheaper. As it is, these areas are being plundered and are not being monitored at all, even though they contain 94% of all the UK's biodiversity."

Are you up for a dive-trip to pristine Pitcairns?

JACQUI CHRISTIAN is the Pitcairn Islands' representative at the EU in Brussels – she is also a diver, and she believes the future of the islands depends on attracting diving visitors, *writes Steve Weinman.*

Christian was at Westminster recently, attending a presentation of the Marine Protection in the UK Overseas Territories campaign and joining Paul Rose in lobbying for the Pitcairns and their pristine waters.

Like most of the 56 islanders she is a descendant of Fletcher Christian, the *Bounty* mutineer. Remains of the famed 18th-century ship can still be seen by divers at the Pitcairn wreck site.

The group of four South Pacific islands, Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno, have a total land area of 18sq miles but are scattered over a wide area of sea.

"I have dived in Pitcairn, but not for a very long time," said Christian. "We've got awesome visibility and the sea is blue like you've never seen it. There are plenty of fish, huge corals and of course the deep reef. My cousins dive there all the time but I've been really busy with paperwork recently.

"We've identified diving as a potential niche market for tourism, but our biggest problem is that while we can fill air tanks we have no decompression chamber if anything should go wrong, so it's not something we promote yet.

"Pitcairn is on budgetary aid, so there would need to be some sort of investment partnership. If someone was interested in setting up a diving business there I don't think the Pitcairn government would turn it down."

Christian's task in Brussels is to raise awareness and improve the islands' accessibility. "It's lovely having a marine reserve, but to be honest unless we can start getting divers there it's not going to bring much economic benefit to the island. We need both protection and the growth."

Only the occasional dive charter currently visits the Pitcairns, and for UK divers the journey there would be a daunting prospect, although I assure Jacqui Christian that there will always be DIVER readers up for such a challenge.



Diver Jacqui Christian represents the Pitcairns in Europe.

"To get there at the moment you go to Tahiti and then catch a cargo ship, which takes two days to get to Pitcairn," she says."It is a long trip."

Recent unpredictable weather patterns could also be a problem on arrival, as a National Geographic expedition has discovered. "When we get the rain we get the run-off and cloudy water." And there is no hotel, so visitors can expect to lodge in private homes.

Ideally a diver should visit both Pitcairn and Henderson 100 miles away, says Christian. "Those islands provide all the environments people really want. Henderson has loads of sharks, some coral, loads of fish, the birds, the beach, the palm trees. Pitcairn's got the history – it's a really nice blend. But at the moment the only way to do that is by private charter."

Do the islanders feel under active threat from fishing fleets? "We never see anybody, but all the flotsam that's washed up, mostly on Henderson, has to be coming from somewhere.

"The bid for protection was approved four years ago by the Pitcairn community. They see that the islands are not being used in a good way, but also the potential for tourism. My goal before I leave Brussels in a year's time is to get approval to build a small airstrip, probably for private charter flights.

"We'll never be able to meet the requirements for commercial flights, but an airstrip opens up a lot of opportunities."

LIDS drives for


There was no shortage of shopping opportunities.



Monty Halls updates his fans.


Sampling the London School of Diving Try-Dive Pool.

Pictures by Saeed Rashid, David Eaton & Alex Khachadourian



TV's Andy Torbet talks to 10-16-year-olds in the Scuba Youth Zone.


NoTanx Zero To Hero candidates practise breath-hold techniques.


British Underwater Photographer of the Year Matt Doggett.


A range of models were being tried in the Rebreather Pool.



Competition photographers from 50 years ago counterpointed the UPY winners.



So many chances to win – this was blue o two's stand.


Gun or sweet? Zero-vis lucky dip with the Met.


Back with many tales to tell – Paul Rose.



The PhotoZone was invariably buzzing.

WITH THE TRY-DIVE POOL and a starry array of speakers guesting in the Scuba Youth Zone, plus thousands of people new to diving drifting in from the other big activity shows at the ExCeL Centre, the London International Dive Show (LIDS) in mid-February was doing its very best to introduce newcomers and especially youngsters to scuba.

newbies

It may not have been a vintage Dive Show in terms of attendance (Valentine's Day and the Six Nations may have had something to do with that) but there was no shortage of high-quality diversions for visitors. These came in the shape of a continuum of star speakers on the **DIVER** Stage, London Stage and Ocean Theatre; the two pools, featuring static-apnea trials one minute and rebreather comparisons the next; and a vast choice of diving equipment, training and travel options to be found displayed around the hall.

The **DIVER** Awards were presented at LIDS, as were, for the first time, the prizes for Underwater Photographer of the Year (UPY). This inaugural contest, with winning shots on display, attracted a 2500-photo entry and proved a big success, with Alex Mustard following the presentation with a well-attended picture-analysis session.

Apart from winners on stage, there were winners all over the hall in a variety of competitions. The biggest prize of all, in the LIDS 2015 Grand Draw, went to Lawrence Humphrey – an £8000, 17-night dive trip for two in the Philippines is quite a haul for the price of a Show ticket and travel up from Brighton! Dive Safari Asia is fulfilling that dream holiday, offered by Philippines Department of Tourism and its partners.

Furthering the campaign to attract new divers, another draw was held in the Telegraph Outdoor Adventure & Travel Show hall, where a **DIVER** Learn To Dive outreach stand drew interested visitors throughout the four-day event.

Qualified diver Phil Crist of Maidenhead and his step-daughter Megan Archer, a 16-year-old keen to learn, won a £2500 seven-day trip to Roots Camp, El Quseir in Egypt with The Scuba Place and London School of Diving, so Megan will soon be under water.

Another learn-to-dive Red Sea holiday, this time for four, was only the biggest of many prizes won in the Scuba Youth Zone prize draw. The winner was Patrick Jackson, and he and his family will travel to Sharm courtesy of the Egyptian State Tourist Office in London, Rodan Group/Falcon Hotels and Elite Diving.

It's "at ease" now on the Dive Show front – the next UK event is DIVE 2015 at the NEC, Birmingham on 24/25 October. Meanwhile, time to go diving!

Israeli club-divers strike it lucky with old gold haul

IT'S WHAT MANY A DIVER dreams of – and it happened for real for a group of Israeli club-divers in February.

A group from a club linked with Old Caesarea Dive Centre, located between Tel Aviv and Haifa, made the chance discovery of a bunch of gold coins while exploring the port's ancient harbour area, built by Herod the Great around 25-13BC.

The find, which was to lead to the discovery of Israel's largest haul of ancient gold coins, was made after rough winter weather had churned up the seabed.

"We talked about the fact that the sea was going to rise and we wanted to take advantage of the time while we had it," Haifa resident Avivit Fishler, one of the team of divers, told press. "We said we would do our usual route, then decided to move towards the break-water to see if anything interesting was exposed after the storm."

Once there, she said, she saw "two of my friends lingering behind, digging and kicking up dust". initially thinking they had found a coin from a game, the divers realised that it was the real thing, and that other pieces were there.

"I picked up a handful of sand and discovered more coins," said Fishler. "We worked until we ran out of air."

After returning from the shore dive the divers buried their find – a scooped handful of coins – in the sand and marked the spot before going to tell their club director, who informed the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) of the find.

The beach was soon a hotbed of activity, with divers from the IAA's Marine Archaeology Unit arriving with metal-detecting equipment. Searches in the area of the club divers' discovery quickly revealed that a hoard of coins lay there.

WORKING IMMEDIATELY and following up with a second day's diving, the team brought up almost 2000 coins. Because of their high-quality gold content, the coins – dinar, half-dinar and quarter-dinar pieces, of various dimensions and weights – came up as good as new after so long in the sea, not even requiring cleaning or other conservation work in the IAA's laboratory.



Just some of the 2000 gold coins recovered.

CLARA AMIT / ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY



KOBI SHARVIT / ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

The IAA declined to value the haul, spokeswoman Yoli Schwartz saying that it was "so valuable that it's priceless". It was confirmed that the coins had been claimed by the state, with no finder's fee paid.

The IAA described the divers – Fishler, Tzvika Feuer, Kobi Tweena, Yoav Lavi and Yoel Miller – as "model citizens". Under Israeli law, antiquities are state property and a failure to report finds and removal of and/or trading in them are punishable by up to five years' jail.

Experts dated the pieces to the Fatimid Caliphate, which ruled much of the Middle East and North Africa from 909 to 1171. Throwing light on the likely history behind the find, Kobi Sharvit, IAA Director of the Marine Archaeology, said: "The discovery of such a large hoard of coins that had such tremendous economic power in antiquity raises several possibilities regarding its presence on the seabed.

"There is probably a shipwreck there of an official treasury boat that was on its way to the central government in Egypt with taxes that had been collected. Perhaps the treasure of coins was meant to pay the salaries of the Fatimid military garrison that was stationed in Caesarea and protected the city."

Another possibility was that the coins were carried aboard "a large merchant ship that traded with the coastal cities and the ports on the Mediterranean Sea".

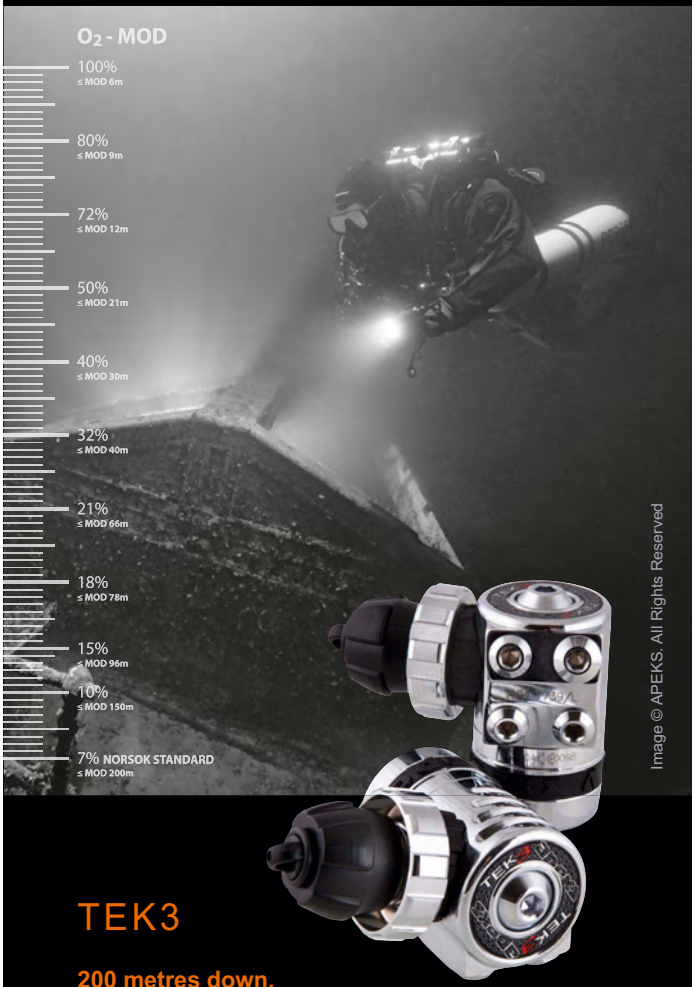
IAA coinage expert Robert Cole said: "The coins that were exposed also remained in the monetary circulation after the Crusader conquest, particularly in the port cities through which international commerce was conducted.

"Several of the coins that were found in the assemblage were bent and exhibit teeth and bite marks, evidence that they were 'physically' inspected by their owners or the merchants. Other coins bear signs of wear and abrasion from use, while others seem as though they were just minted."

The IAA Marine Archaeological Unit hopes to conduct further excavations of the finds site in a bid to understand more certainly how the coins came to be wrecked at Caesarea.

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Skipper guilty over diver deaths

A SHELLFISHING BOAT OPERATOR has been found guilty of safety failings in relation to operations in which a diver lost his life in Scotland's Firth of Forth.

In the civil case, Stirling Sheriff Court heard how Guthrie Melville, 60, hired James Irvine, 42, to dive for razor clams in March 2011 in Largo Bay, from his 8m boat *Solstice*.

Irvine dived alone, with no means of communication with the boat, no back-up divers, no SMB and no means of recovery into the boat in an emergency.

Melville deployed unapproved apparatus whereby probes connected by cables to an onboard power source were used by the diver to stun the razorfish.

An HSE principal inspector of diving who went aboard *Solstice* in Fife's Methil Docks told the court that "there was a risk of serious injury to a diver diving on the seabed on top of unprotected copper electrodes attached to a welding generator that could put out quite a serious amount of power".

"Bearing in mind that it only takes a few milliamps going up your arm and across your chest to stop your heart, I formed the opinion that there was a risk of serious injury," he said.

Formal notices prohibiting electro-fishing specifically and shellfishing generally from *Solstice* were issued after the inspection.

Irvine was found by police divers lying on his back on the seabed in 8m of water, with no mask and his regulator out of his mouth. His drysuit inflation hose was disconnected, this being his only buoyancy lifting option, as he was not wearing a BC.

He was wearing 21kg of weights which, a police diving supervisor told the court, was "a lot of weight to try to return to the surface if you have no buoyancy".

After a five-day trial, jurors found Melville guilty of having breached a catalogue of Health & Safety and Diving at Work regulations.

He was also found guilty of putting five other divers at risk over a period dating back to spring 2005.

As **DIVER** went to press sentencing, which could involve a jail term, had been deferred for reports.

Wildlife photo call for May

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS and videographers, amateur and professional, are being invited to file entries for the British Wildlife Photography Awards 2015, now in its sixth year and with a £20,000 prize fund, including £5000 for the overall winner.

"Winners and commended entrants will have their work showcased in a touring exhibition and stunning book, and will be invited to an exclusive Awards ceremony in London," says the organiser.



Safety in a Snakelocks Anemone by Trevor Rees, Highly Commended in last year's Coast & Marine category.

Their work will "reach millions through national exposure" and help "raise awareness about British wildlife and celebrate our natural heritage".

Entries need to be in by 2 May. www.bwpawards.org.

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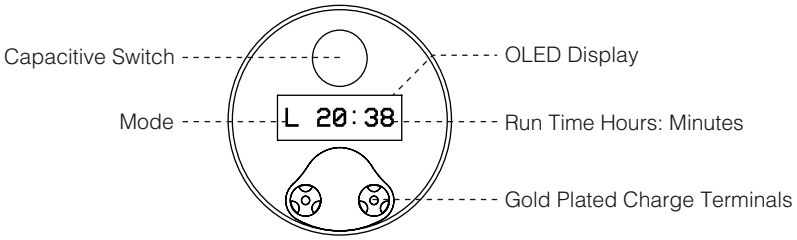
Depth Rated and pressure tested to 20 Bar / 200 meters pressure.

SPECIFICATION

Weight	231g
Output	1800 Lumens
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Diameter	47mm
Battery	2900 mAh
Runtime	2-24hrs
Beam Angle	20° Smooth Spot



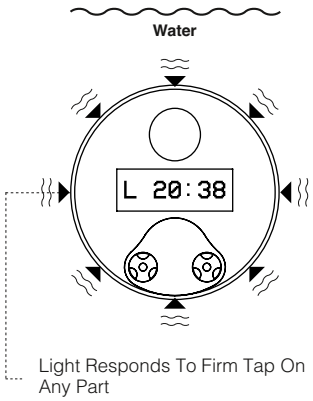
Utilising the most advanced CREE L.E.D's and lithium-ion battery technology, the SUB M3 provides exceptional outputs for extended durations. Automatic switch conversion recognises if you are above or below the water, switching between motion switching and capacitive switching for effortless mode adjustment. The OLED screen ensures your light feeds back how much light output remains in hours and minutes ensuring you have control.



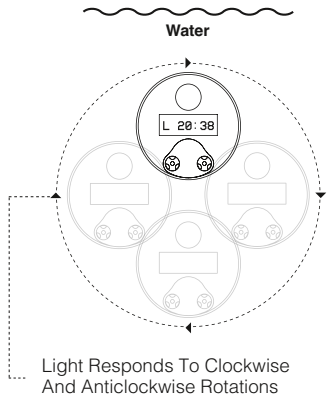
SUBMERGED MODE

The SUB M3 light will automatically change from Capacitive switching on the surface to Motion control switching when submerged.

Below Water
Motion Switch / Submerged Mode



Below Water
Motion Switch / Submerged Mode



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EXPOSURE LIGHTS

WHEN IT ALL GETS TOO MUCH

By the time you're reading this it'll be almost Easter, the traditional start of the UK diving season, and the sooner the better, a sentiment shared by a couple of well 'ard, rufty-tufty divers from the North-east who arrived early one Sunday morning at a local lake.

Both of them were a bit bleary-eyed as they climbed out of their car and had a stretch and a yawn, but that's nothing unusual.

Visit any inland site in the country early on a Sunday and you'll see the same tableau repeated over and over again.

Our heroes soon had their kit ready, both twinned-up, obviously, and were zipping each other's drysuits when the one currently doing the zipping stopped, sighed, and in a weary voice said:

"Bother it, I can't be bothering bothered diving in this bothering lake. It's a bothering hole for bother's sake. Let's just bothering go home?"

That isn't really what he said, I've censored it a bit.

"Thank bother for that," said his mate, and within five minutes the pair of them were back in the car and on the way home, smiling much more happily than when they had arrived.

Good call, guys, take it from me.

Falcon has landed

They say that the best way to make a million out of diving is to start off with two million, and Florida dive-shop owner Abdiel Falcon may be on the brink of finding out how true that is.

Falcon is alleged to have been running PADI courses and issuing appropriate qualification cards from his dive-shop, Ocean Hunters, only without going to all the trouble and expense of being a PADI instructor or associated in any way with PADI.

He is said to have trained more than 300 divers, charging them between $149 and $399 each for their worthless certifications.

Now that the authorities have caught up with him, he's looking at a potential fine of $10,000 per customer, $15,000 if the customer was a senior citizen, plus reimbursement of the costs of the investigation and case against him. That's got to hurt.

Snorkel safety

Welcome to the "it seemed like a good idea at the time" department.

Hawaii is about to introduce a bill requiring all snorkels sold or rented to be fitted with a safety-valve. It's part of an effort to reduce the number of snorkelling fatalities, of which there were more in the past few years than in scuba, freediving, surfing and swimming combined.

The thinking is that the valve will stop water entering the snorkel when you submerge, so you can't inhale it and drown.

This sounds like a good idea, but do you remember those snorkels with ping-pong balls in a cage at the top of the tube? The idea was that when you ducked under water the ball closed off the tub.

Despite the simple, lo-tech mechanics, they worked very well. Too well.

Every time you turned your head or a wave rippled past, the little ball blocked the tube and stopped air, as well as water, getting into it.

Very soon you were inhaling more in hope than expectation, and vowing that as soon as you got out of the water the damned ball and cage was coming off.

And anyway, all you had to do was remember not to breathe when you were under water and all was well.

I wonder if the new valves will work any better?

Visualise that dive

At a stroke, Korean electronics giant Samsung has sorted out all your buoyancy-control problems, stopped you getting chilled toward the end of a dive and relegated decompression illness and running out of gas to the Dark Ages of scuba diving.

Its new Gear VR headset will allow you to go diving anywhere you fancy, any time you fancy. Eventually. At the moment you can just do a shark dive, but you can do it at any time.

To prove the point, Samsung opened a dive shop in Alice Springs, Australia, which is in the middle of the desert and 700 miles from the nearest diveable body of water.

The kit looks a bit like a pair of headphones with a bulky single-glass scuba mask, but put it on, fire it up and you have an immersive visual and audio experience that can simulate anything you care to mention in the comfort of your own front room.

Turn or tilt your head and you can look up, down and all around to follow the action, so a swivel chair would probably be a good idea.

I wonder how long it will be before the agencies release their "Virtual Diver" speciality courses?

Not just a bit of fun

Search and recovery dives are probably not the most fun you can have under water. They always seem to be made in poor vis and low temperatures, and in places where entanglement hazards abound.

And then there's the whole question of exactly what it is that you're looking for, and if you really want to find it by touch in the cold and dark.

Sometimes, however, they do have their lighter side. Anglers in County Wicklow in Ireland noticed something shiny in the water of Vartry Reservoir, far shallower than normal because of the dry weather.

A quick fish around recovered rope, chains, a set of handcuffs, some leg-restraints and a ball-gag, and if you're wondering what they could possibly be used for, just have a quick read of *Fifty Shades of Grey.*

After an overnight think, the anglers took the items to the local police, who deployed their search and recovery team.

Further items recovered included more handcuffs, a black leather fetish mask and assorted sex toys, all of which would undoubtedly have ended up at the annual squad Xmas party.

Except that they then found the sawn-off barrels of a double-barrelled shotgun, a couple of mobile phones and a SIM card relating to an open murder case.

Blood relative

The following is not taught on diver training courses, for many reasons.

Shu Pei had a bad nose-bleed on a dive. Her buddy Richard responded by placing his mouth over her nose, sucking out the blood and spitting it away to prevent her choking, repeating until all was well. *Yerch!*

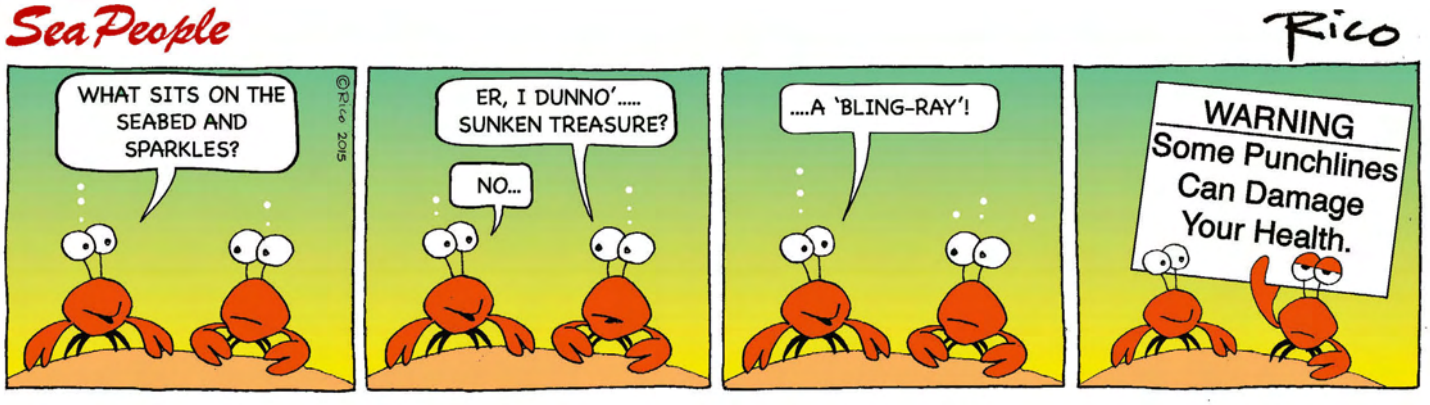
Still, Shue Pei survived and Richard may have had an ulterior motive, because he and Shu Pei are now happily married.

Water pistol

Some things work worse in water, others better. Take the AK47 machine-gun.

Not only does the ridiculously robust AK fire quite happily under water, but because water is incompressible it actually reloads itself more quickly, so you can get off more rounds per second.

Of course, as water is incompressible your bullets won't go as fast or as far, but hey, you can't have everything. Video evidence is available on t'Internet.




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HERE'S TO THE 2015 SEASON!



April marks the start of the dive season for the majority of UK divers, so we asked South Coast specialist WILL APPLEYARD to suggest a handful of sites where the experienced and beginners alike might ease themselves into the sea…

FAR MULBERRY

Selsey, West Sussex

ARGUABLY THE MOST scenic dive-site along the Sussex coast, the Far Mulberry is perfectly placed to entertain every level of diver.

For those unfamiliar with its history, the Mulberry harbour was created to provide a portable floating pontoon to aid the Normandy D-Day landings of 1944, and scores of these oblong hulks of concrete were dragged over to France.

This one, however, never completed that historic journey, and instead sank several miles offshore. Over time it broke up to provide us with what is the perfect artificial reef.

The site sits in just 10m and will take a RIB around 20 minutes to reach from Selsey's east beach – which should give you plenty of time to familiarise yourself with kit that may have been used only in the Red Sea between now and your last UK dive.

On reaching your first dive-site of the season, you will be presented with the luxury of a mooring-chain for descent, rather than the faff of being driven by a temporary shotline and having to get down it sharpish. At the Far Mulberry, you can take your time.

Above: End of a good dive at the Mulberries.

Below: A calm day at the Mulberry site.

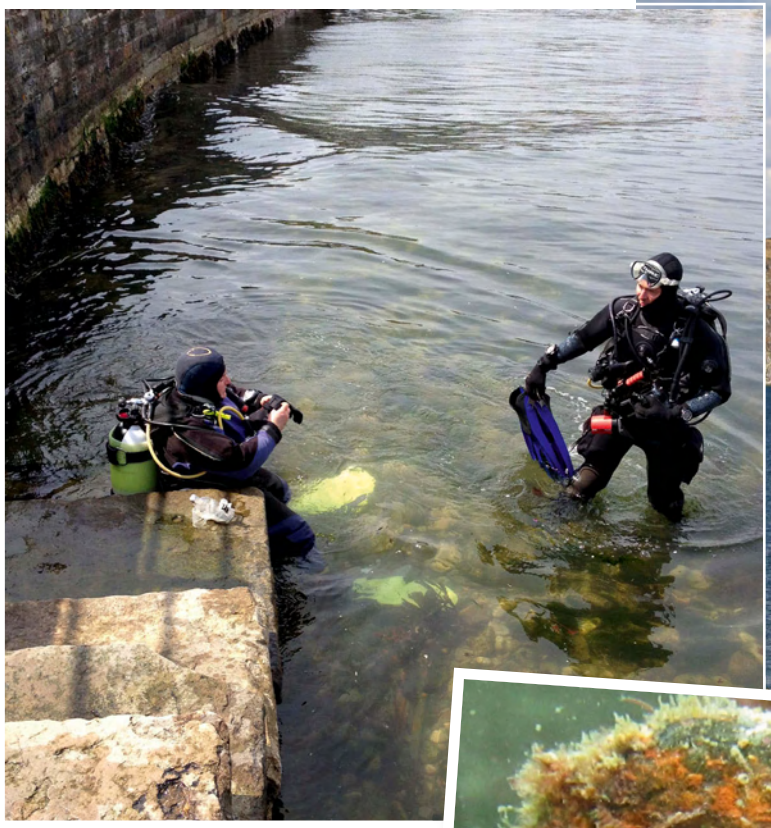
The site, or "wreck", as I suppose it could be called, sits only metres from the bottom of the chain, and several prominent features make the area easy to navigate visually.

A garden of dead men's fingers carpets one of the most prominent parts, which consists of a wall of concrete listing at 45° and creating an overhang for you to fin by for 10m, standing 5m proud of the seabed.

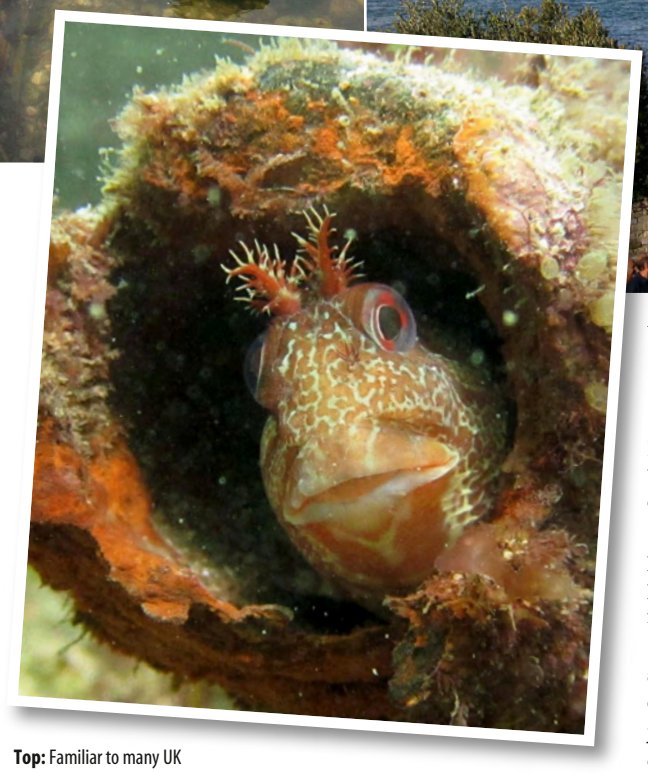
This twisted mix of metal and concrete has over the years become festooned with life, from shoals of bib present on an epic scale, to solitary lumpsuckers, wrasse of every kind, bass and bream.

The dive-site in no way resembles the Mulberry harbour in its original form,









but rather an almost natural-looking rocky reef system. To circumnavigate the pile of remains can take an hour, although at this time of year numb fingers may force you to cut that dive-time in half.

If that's the case, simply take a short-cut and fin over the top and back to the mooring-chain for your safety stop.

It's worth mentioning that there is also the wreck of a small vessel known as the *Cuckoo* lying about a 20m fin from the mooring-chain, in the opposite direction from the main dive-site.

If you've enjoyed your dive here, come back another day and check it out.

✷ Mulberry Divers, mulberrydivers.co.uk (RIB), South Coast Diving & Fishing, selsey-fish-trips.com/diving (Hardboat). Average cost: £25 per diver

SWANAGE PIER
Dorset

I KNOW DIVERS WHO regularly spend 75 minutes or more messing about under Swanage Pier. I've seen folks with rebreathers diving it, as well as experienced open-circuit divers and newbies alike, and there's a good reason for that – it's one of the most accessible and well-catered-for coastal dive-sites in the country.

You could almost arrive already kitted up, park up and backward-roll straight from the car into the (usually) clear water. It's by no means a challenging dive, but perfectly placed as your first dive session of the season.

Top: Familiar to many UK divers, the steps at Swanage Pier.

Above: A tompot blenny holed out at the pier.

Top right: View of the pier and Swanage Bay.

A relatively constant depth of 4m means that, should your gear feel somewhat unfamiliar after several months of hibernation in the garage, you can simply pop to the surface to sort a problem out, should you so choose.

Two hundred and twenty-five metres of pier also means that you should have plenty of room even if scores of other divers choose it for their April shakedown dive too.

There is usually plenty of wildlife to see as well, but don't be too disheartened if it's a little short on life in April – those critters need a couple of months to show up again from early spring onwards.

Access to the beginning of your dive couldn't be easier either, with a set of concrete steps leading you into knee-deep water right by the loos. Divers Down operates a well-stocked shop, air station and several boats right on the pier, so should any of your beloved dive-kit have perished or simply disappeared during its winter storage, dig out your best credit card and restock that kit-bag in the shop.

Trollies are in good supply to wheel piles of equipment about, and there are plenty of places to grab a hot drink and food in close proximity to the dive action.

In short, this is a relatively safe and sheltered place to brush up on rusty skills or dust off that cobweb-clad neoprene – just keep one eye out for any boat traffic coming to and from the pier while you're in the water.

Feeling a bit more adventurous after your pier dive? Check out what's on offer boat-dive-wise from the pier while you're down there.

✷ Divers Down, diversdownswanage.co.uk. Average cost: Day parking £8.50 / diving £2.50

DRAWNA ROCKS
Porthkerris, Cornwall

IF I WAS ASKED TO DESIGN the perfect shore-diving environment, I think Drawna Rocks would have to be it, or at least very close. Set within the idyllic Cornish cove at Porthkerris, this dive-site





Below: An edible crab – this one is a Swanage resident.

Bottom: Porthkerris – Drawna Rocks is the entry point for divers.

comes very close to the ideal start-of-season check-dive.

Porthkerris Divers has been established here for donkeys' years and maintains a superb setting for every level of diver.

The well-stocked shop and classroom sits right by the shore and spacious car park, and there's an opportunity to buy hot food and drinks adjacent to that.

Toilet and shower facilities sit just behind the shop, and an area to rinse kit is provided too.

It's possible to park right next to the entry point at Drawna Rocks, which is essentially the "house reef". The rocks begin at the shore, and the grey pebbly beach slopes gently down from the shore to 18m. Head past the last of the rocks and you'll enter deeper water still.

The site is protected from all but easterly winds, so it is diveable on most days and at any state of tide. If you feel super-rusty and need an experienced hand to hold, Porthkerris runs guided dives around the rocks for a fee.

This is not a bad idea in any case, because these guys know the site very well, and will point out a selection of critters that you might otherwise miss.

Another benefit of starting your dive season at Drawna Rocks is that the water clarity is often excellent, so keeping an eye on your buddy's progress shouldn't be a problem.

Once submerged, the diving can be spectacular and the marine life plentiful. Areas of kelp cover the shallower rocks, while heading deeper these give way to a labyrinth of walls, swim-throughs and small caverns. It can be quite a disorientating dive, so keeping one eye on the compass is recommended, taking note of which direction is home at least.

Everything you would expect to find in British waters seems to live here, from





cuttlefish to monkfish, gurnard, nudibranchs and even the occasional basking shark, depending on the time of year.

In April the water temperature will be around 11 or 12° and will clearly have a bearing on your dive-time, so if you have enjoyed your first dive of the season at Drawna Rocks, come back during the summer months and spend a good hour exploring them.

Geographically for most of us Porthkerris is a reasonable drive away, so ideally it's a long-weekend dive-trip. If camping during the springtime isn't for you, or you don't have the luxury of a campervan, there are several B&Bs in the neighbouring village of St Keverne.

There is also a varied list of dive-sites accessible by boat leaving from the cove, so it's worth checking in with Porthkerris Divers to see where else the boats might be going.

Above: Jellyfish at Devil's Kitchen, Knoll Pins, Lundy

Below: Grey seal at Knoll Pins.

Above right: Heading out to Warbarrow Tout.

Porthkerris Divers, porthkerrisdivers.com. Average cost: Day parking £2 / shore-diving £5. Camping onsite from £16, one guided dive £35, two £55.



KNOLL PINS
Lundy Island, Devon

THOSE LONG WINTER MONTHS can leave the keenest of UK divers seriously dried out, and withdrawal symptoms will often have taken them to an inland dive site at least once during the off-season.

For these predominantly sea-loving, drysuited beasts, a half-hour bimble around an easily reached local wreck or a simple shakedown shore-dive won't be enough to throw them fins-first into the action when the season proper starts.

These guys will be looking for more of an expedition-style dive trip to rehydrate that crusty dive equipment, at a location that requires some planning and probably a whole weekend away.

One place that ticks those boxes is Lundy Island. A mile wide and just three miles long, Lundy is situated in the Bristol Channel some 24 miles off Ifracombe in Devon, and promises the UK diver an all-round adventurous experience.

The boat journey, usually made from Ilfracombe, can take three hours to complete, which is where the excitement starts with pods of porpoises and occasionally whales passing as you motor towards the island.

The anticipation continues to grow, as what starts out as just a speck on the horizon transforms into an island when the boat makes its final approach.

There is a decent selection of dive-sites to choose from at Lundy, with most of them protected by the lee of the island's eastern side.

The most popular sites with day-boats are within easy reach of open-water divers with some UK diving experience, while other sites are better suited to Advanced or equivalent divers and above.





The diving here is by no means hardcore, and being washed by the cool, clear waters of the Atlantic the area is perfectly suited to those who have been away from any water for some months.

On arriving at Lundy, the skipper will usually give you a couple of choices of site, and the Knoll Pins will be somewhere near the top of the list. "Pins" reveals this to be a pinnacle site, in this instance formed by a pair of pinnacles that break the surface during low tide.

Pinnacle dive-sites are perfect for every level of diver, given that it's possible to specify the depth to suit ability.

Those accustomed to UK diving would probably prefer to hop in and head straight for the seabed at around 20m, meandering around the pinnacles until they hit sand. The more cautious may want to take time and fin in a figure-of-eight pattern around the site several times at around half that depth.

Whichever way you choose to explore the Knoll Pins, keep one eye on the green, because Lundy grey seals also enjoy diving there.

A kelp forest blows to and fro down to about 6m and eventually gives way to more rock, festooned with delicate pink seafans that thrive in these nutrient-rich waters. Sea cucumbers are plentiful, and urchins and crab species fill every hole as you descend the wall.

One advantage of diving on a pinnacle is that during your journey back to the surface it's possible to maintain a visual reference all the way up by following the wall and completing a safety stop in the lee of any current that may have picked up.

Although perhaps not necessary at this site, it is worth practising DSMB deployment before the boat comes to collect you, given that you may not have used this vital piece of kit since the previous summer.

Once you've remembered what all that pricey equipment does, and have perhaps grown used to some new additions, it's time to explore two more dive-sites before either making your way back to the mainland or continuing your expedition-style adventure by camping on the island.

Obsession Boat Charters, obsession boatcharters.co.uk. Average cost: Day-boat charter £870, or £175 for a single two-day package. Day parking £8; Hele Valley camping £21, helevalley.co.uk



Above: The top of Knoll Pins.

Below left: Dahlia anemone.

Bottom: A dive-boat heads for a new Lundy site.

WARBARROW TOUT
Dorset

OFTEN OVERLOOKED by local dive centres but popular in summer months with the occupants of club-boats, this site combines several appealing factors in one go – a scenic boat trip there and back, a wreck-dive and a UK-style "reef dive".

Located in the middle of the Jurassic coastline and a World Heritage Site no less, Warbarrow Tout is home to a super little barge wreck accessible to every diver. Half of the wreck is still in an easy-going 10m of water, so you shouldn't ever have to feel your way round it in the dark.

The remaining parts happen to be one side of the hull that stands 4m proud and level sections of bow, stern and a portion of deck, so it's not difficult to navigate.

Done the wreck and feeling at one with your equipment again? Head north to the reefy section of the dive. Big boulders will keep you entertained, as they create the ideal habitat for a diverse range of marine life. The MoD's tank firing range isn't too far away and evidence of spent artillery is apparent on the seabed from time to time.

Scimitar Diving, scimitardiving.co.uk. Average cost: £40 for a two-dive trip.



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DIVING THE EDGE OF THE OLD WORLD

THE TINY CANARY ISLAND of El Hierro lies at what was once regarded as the outer limit of the known world. Beyond its shores, large, aggressive serpents patrolled the seaways, devouring unworthy sailors before their ships simply fell off the edge of the Earth.

As it became clear that the world was in fact round, and that no-one was going to unleash a kraken, ships finally set sail across the Atlantic Ocean.

But they still needed some way of knowing where they were.

Cartographers outside the British Empire used El Hierro, the western edge of the Old World, as the prime meridian – the arbitrary dividing line running vertically around the globe that would allow travellers to pinpoint their location.

This was vital when land hadn't been sighted for days, and everyone on board except Giovanni the Lime Manager had scurvy. The Ferro Meridian, as it was known, was used outside the British Empire until as recently as 1851, when it was decided that the 0° global prime meridian would be based on Greenwich.

With map-makers no longer paying this tiny island south-west of Tenerife any attention, El Hierro slipped into obscurity.

A CENTURY AFTER the meridian was changed, holiday-makers discovered the warm winter sun of the Canary Islands, and in the past few decades Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Tenerife have become synonymous with package beach holidays. El Hierro was left to its own devices, and has remained untainted.

It is a place with small-island values, and its small tourist industry is made up mostly of divers and walkers. If you want to find a British breakfast at midday or a Sunday roast on a Wednesday, this is not the place for you.

If, on the other hand, you like a peaceful atmosphere, friendly locals, serenity and stress-free diving, El Hierro is well worth a visit.

To get to Europe's south-western reaches is not that difficult. Oonasdivers offers diving or walking trips to the island that tie in with groups led by Irishman Shane Gray, the man who started Scubadivewest, an Irish dive centre



GAVIN PARSONS pushes the boundaries by venturing to El Hierro, the Atlantic island once thought to mark the end of the world

Pictured: A diver investigates the wall at Roca Bermesa.

popular with the British. The tours all meet on Tenerife and take the daily two-hour ferry to El Hierro.

On the far south of the island is the diminutive port town of La Restinga, a place of fishing-boats and dive centres.

There are more dive centres than any other type of shop, which shows just how popular strapping a tank to your back and jumping into the water is in this tucked-away corner of Europe.

So enthusiastic are the locals that this little town has managed to mount a world-renowned underwater photography competition for the past 18 years.

Photosub attracts top photographers from across Spain, and they compete in teams with models and even art directors. It is a spectacular feat that puts anything the UK can organise to shame.

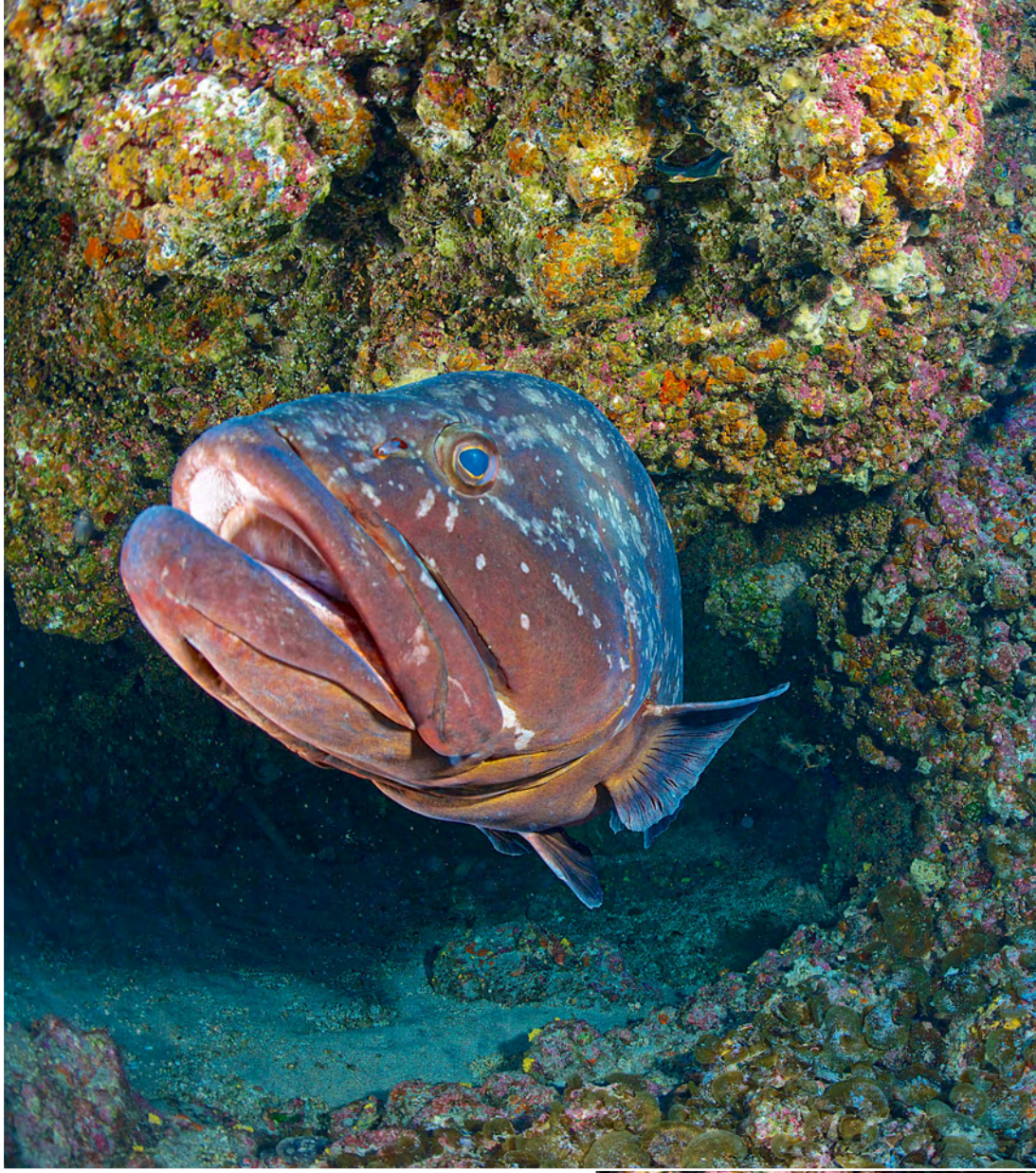
THE REASON FOR Photosub's popularity and the sheer number of dive centres here became clear as I stuck my head under the water for the first time, and the vista opened up before me. With no rivers emptying into the sea, and being far out into the ocean, water quality is excellent and great visibility the norm.

This allows divers to explore pinnacles, walls, caverns and swim-throughs created when the ocean works on the volcanic rock. All the Canary Islands are volcanic, but El Hierro's volcanic origins are right in your face.

There is, for example, no need to trek miles into the wilderness to find lava fields so untouched that they appear to have spewed from the Earth only days before. In El Hierro, they lie at the end of the street.

The whole island is one big cooled volcano, and the ocean has moulded the fresh rock into all sorts of interesting shapes for divers to explore.

The most famous of these edifices is El Bajon. Had the eruption that created it had a bit more *umph*, Europe would have had a little more land, but El Bajon gets only to within 8m of the surface.

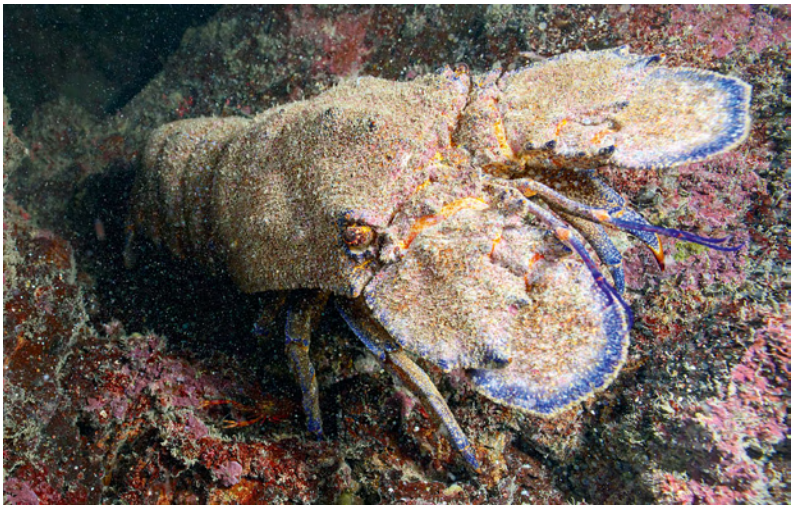


This great lump of rock sits in an oceanic current that flows past the southern point of El Hierro, and is said to be visited by mantas, mobulas, sharks and even whale sharks on occasion.

Sadly when I visited there was too much surge and not enough current to attract ocean wanderers.

I was instead left with the spectacle of striated rock and a wall of barracuda a bit too far-off to photograph.

El Bajon may be the most famous site,





Above: Large dusky grouper hang out on the ledges during the day at Baja Bacarones.

Left: A slipper lobster emerges during a night dive in the harbour.

Right: A site called Coral has lots of places to poke your head through.





but my favourite was Baja Bacarones, a pinnacle reaching from 45m to 10m.

Between 27m and 12m are a series of ledges where a couple of grouper hung out. Grouper are common in El Hierro because spearfishing is not popular, and a marine reserve protects them.

Several species are found, but the most impressive is the dusky grouper (*Epinephelus marginatus*). These fish grow to the size of a small car, as I found when following the divemaster's rattle.

As my head popped up on a ledge I was confronted by an eye that looked the size of my head, and a head the size of my scuba kit. Had this grouper wanted to, it could almost have swallowed me whole.

But it just sat waiting for the horde of divers to take their pictures and pass by.

Dusky grouper are found throughout the Mediterranean and tropical Atlantic. I have often seen them swimming away.

In El Hierro, with no fishing pressure, even the smaller females (they mature into males at around 12 years old) are as curious as a fox sensing a three-day-old roast chicken in a bin-bag.

They just stare at you. Hanging motionless nose to nose with a fish that big is about as surreal as seeing a Hell's Angel at a Kylie Minogue concert.

Between the pinnacle and the shore, where the boat anchors, is a gently sloping expanse of sand, then a boulder field.

At other sites the topography is completely different, and this is what attracts me to places such as the Canary Islands, because the dives vary. I can get a bit bored by the tropics, but El Hierro changes on every dive.

The fish life may be less abundant, but there is a plethora of benthic beauties to keep any diver occupied. If you're fed up on one bit of a dive just wait, because the next bit will be completely different.

BARCO CHINO IS ONE such dive. It is littered with swim-throughs and rock-stacks, all in shallow, clear water. I felt like an eight-year-old on his first visit to an adventure playground, and the *soupçon* of surge just added to the excitement.

Another site called Roca Bermesa is different again, furnished with a lovely cavern. Each fin-kick back into the island is like munching an adventurous apple, each bite more exciting than the last.

The water was clear until the dive-group kicked up the silt. That didn't detract too much from the beauty of the place, but entering was not half as beautiful as coming out.

The sun streaming into the curved opening was spectacular.





Left: At Roca Bermesa the rock formations create an adventure playground for divers and, when combined with a little surge, make a fun end to the dive.

Above right: The quiet harbour at La Restinga.

Right: The boulder fields and rocky outcrops turn up creatures such as this large spiny pufferfish.

A short way down the wall from the cave is a drop-off where, at 28m, you'll find a forest of black coral. This stuff is rare because it's not black but a beautiful red, and has been harvested around the Mediterranean region for generations to make jewellery.

As the dive comes to a close, an impressive rock gully picks you up and spits you out with a bit of surge, topping off a real fun dive.

The area outside the harbour is a marine reserve, which has saved the grouper, barracuda and black coral.

There are strict rules for diving there, including a ban on night-diving, which has to be done inside the harbour.

Enough EU money was spent on the sea defences to render Nigel Farrage apoplectic, but the result is a harbour that's arresting both above and below the waterline.

The harbour wall is made from gigantic blocks of stone that sit on a 6m-deep plateau. This slopes to the 10m-deep seabed over a jumble of boulders that makes an ideal habitat for all manner of darkness-loving marine life.

I saw all the regular suspects – octopuses, slipper lobsters, shrimps and the like. The reef extends along the harbour wall and out into a catchment basin. It's no deeper than 12m, and there is life everywhere.







Clockwise from top: El Hierro's most famous dive is El Bajon; at the bottom of the harbour wall is a field of delicate anemones; jack emerge from a small cave.

Below: Children fish and swim in the harbour.

OUR PLAN WAS TO swim out and back to the steps at the far end of the harbour, but we got so engrossed that we ran out of time and had to surface halfway back.

It was after 10pm before we had sorted ourselves out at the dive centre and headed off for dinner. As this was El Hierro, the restaurant stayed open just for us and the staff welcomed us warmly.

La Restinga is a special place because of that attitude. Everyone is friendly, from the woman watering the flowerbeds outside the apartments to Marissa, an old lady who led us up a hill to show us a new restaurant. Few others places would see a senior citizen talking to two foreigners as if they were long-lost family.

In La Restinga locking doors is frowned upon, traffic almost non-existent, and kids play in the streets and in the water without being watched over constantly.

With its calm, quiet air, the place is as welcome as finding £20 down the back of your sofa.

Outside the town, a network of dedicated trails take walkers of varying abilities into the heart and soul of this unique island.

On the north-western shore, a huge landslide about 15,000 years ago has created a massive bite out of the rock interior. On what is now called El Golfo, from the vantage-point of the Mirador de la Peña restaurant perched on the hillside, you can see down to the world's smallest hotel and the crashing Atlantic still trying to eat away at the island.

The interior is a mix of farmland, volcanic scrub and pine forest. Scuba-divers rarely get a chance to do much other than dive, but take time to see at least some of the island.

If time has forgotten El Hierro in some respects, in others it is ahead of the trend. It is working to becoming power self-sufficient through a combination of hydro- and wind electricity power generation. Free public wi-fi is promised and already operational in some parts.

El Hierro fast became one of my favourite parts of the EU. This is a place a diver can fall in love with.

FACTFILE



GETTING THERE ▸▸ Three-hour flights to Tenerife from London, Manchester and regional airports, then a two-hour ferry ride to El Hierro and a one-hour drive to La Restinga.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ El Submarino. Self-catering apartments in modern blocks on the harbourside.

WHEN TO GO ▸▸ Year-round, though spring and autumn are regarded as the best times to visit.

LANGUAGE ▸▸ Spanish, but English widely spoken.

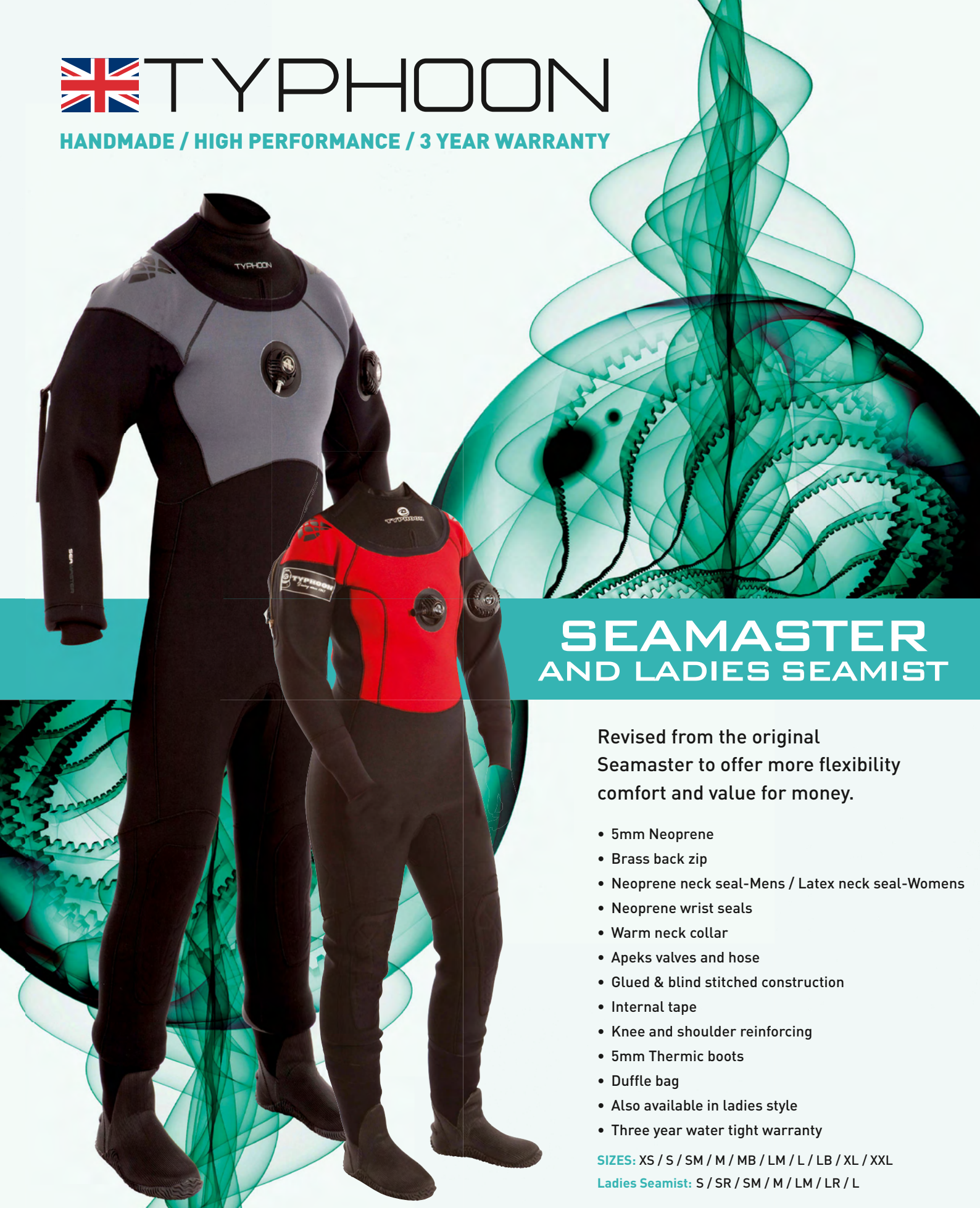
CURRENCY ▸▸ Euro.

PRICES ▸▸ Oonasdivers offers packages in March, April, October and November from £665. This includes return flights, overnight hotel in Tenerife, guided road and ferry transfers, five nights' accommodation and 10 dives, www.oonasdivers.com

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.turismodecanarias.com

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JUST FOR STARTERS

Sue Guess was the winner of the latest BSoUP Beginners Portfolio Competition for the DIVER Trophy – these were her winning images







THE ANNUAL BEGINNERS PORTFOLIO Competition, organised by the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP), is held each November and is open to members and non-members alike, provided they have not come first, second or third in a major national or international competition.

The objective is to identify photographers who can demonstrate a range of skills. The portfolio should communicate variety, not necessarily of subject, but certainly of approach and technique.

It has to comprise six images, set out in two rows of three with no overlap. Each image may, or may not, have a border.

This year's winner was Sue Guess from West Sussex, married with two adult sons. Sue studied fashion design and worked in the industry for a few years before having children. Soft furnishing then allowed her to work from home, although she took 10 years out from that career to work in relocation.

"I started diving, reluctantly, in 1999, to fulfil a rash promise to our younger son that I would learn with him when he turned 12, as my husband Martyn had when our elder son was old enough to

ABOVE: Mating octopus ("unfortunately the mate is out of shot"), Barge wreck, Red Sea: 'His relaxed state allowed me to take far more shots than an octopus will usually permit before moving on.' *(Sony NEX5N, 30mm macro lens, 1/125 f14)*

TOP CENTRE: Split-shot, Ras Kati, Red Sea: 'Towards the end of the trip and feeling like a snorkel rather than a dive, the shallow-reef at Ras Kati and *Whirlwind* moored up for the night gave a good opportunity to try taking a split shot, to prove to the sceptics that it can be done with a very small dome.' (*Sony NEX5N, E2.8/16 wide-angle lens, 1/60 f18*).

RIGHT: Wreck, Tubbataha reef, Philippines: 'I'm not usually a wreck fan, but this one was very decayed and so gave some interesting shapes against the light in the shallow water. After many years of modelling for Martyn, he was happy to swim into my shot and be on the receiving end of my gesticulations.' *(Sony NEX5N, wide-angle lens, 1/160 f13)*





learn," says Sue.

"We did our PADI Open Water in Sharm, and to date I've dived only in warm water. There was a one-off dive in the Med that was about 16°, but never again."

Sue and Martyn have since dived in Menorca, the Caribbean, the Maldives, Indonesia, Micronesia and Papua New Guinea.

"As an antidote to boredom while Martyn took his thousands of shots, I bought a compact camera and housing with the idea of taking video, which I enjoyed, but I found the editing somewhat tedious," says Sue.

"Eventually in June 2012 I had my first trip with my Sony, which has brought me to winning this competition.

"Having been on many Martin Edge trips, and living with Martyn and his enthusiasm and expertise, I had a headstart with underwater photography – the theory at least – and have enjoyed learning a new skill."

BSoUP is a not-for-profit organisation run by volunteers. Members meet at Imperial College, South Kensington, London, on the third Wednesday of every month for a programme that includes illustrated talks and competitions. Newcomers are welcome, **www.bsoup.org**





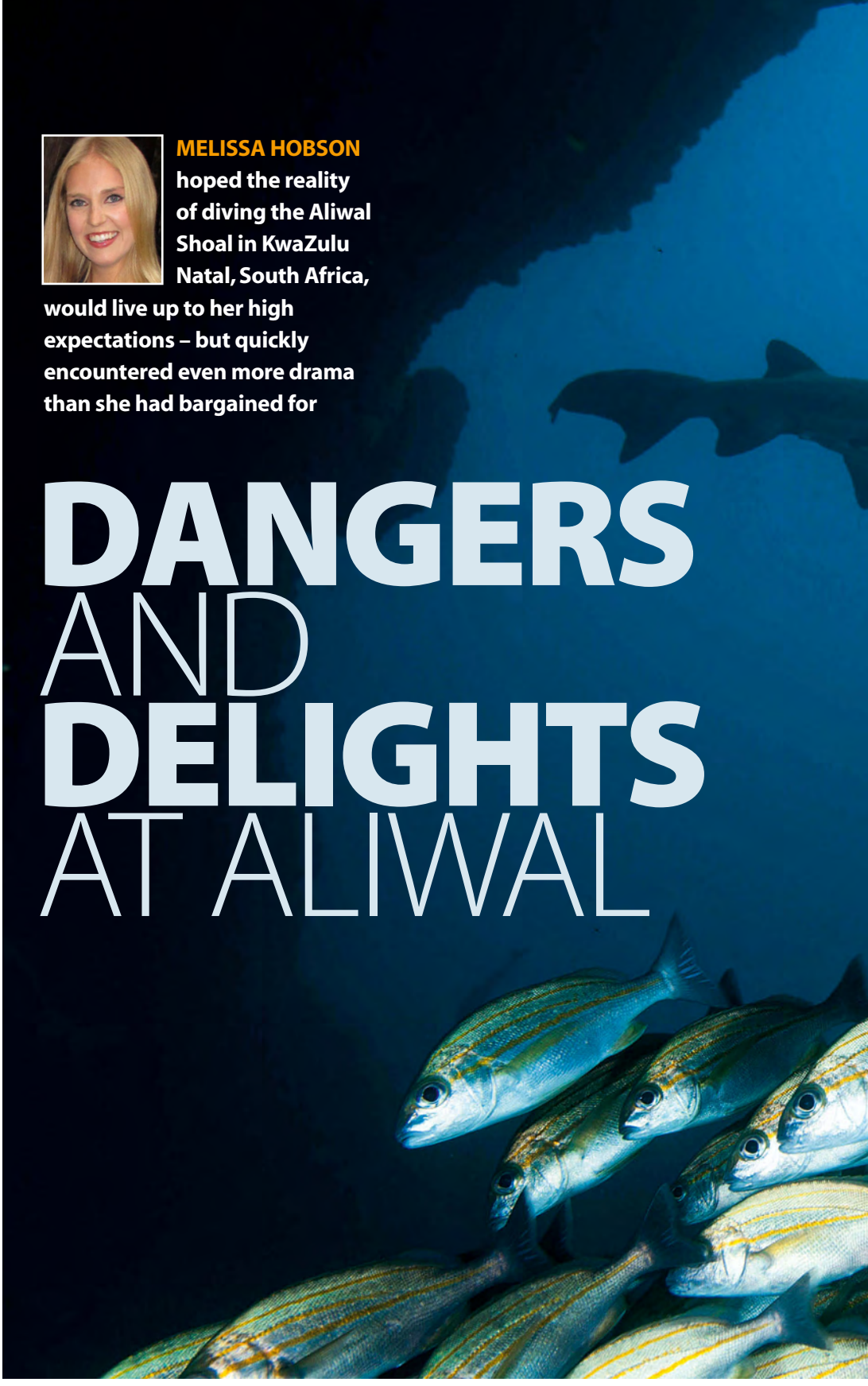
ABOVE: Nemos, North Sulawesi, Indonesia: 'I had a flood in my housing, so had to use whichever camera and lens Martyn didn't want! Probably essential subject matter for this portfolio.' (*Nikon D800, 105 lens, 1/320 f22*)



ABOVE: Dusk shot, Tubbataha reef shallows, Philippines: 'I found the dramatic coral formation first and then waited for the sun to drop to the optimum height to give the rays without burning out.' (*Sony NEX5N, wide-angle lens, 1/125 f9*)

LEFT: Coleman shrimps, Lembeh Strait, Indonesia. 'The urchins were at about 25m and the shrimps seemed to be on every one, so there was plenty of choice to find them well-positioned for the shot.' (*Sony NEX5N, standard 18-55 lens, 1/125 f22*)

All images were taken using Nauticam housings.



MELISSA HOBSON hoped the reality of diving the Aliwal Shoal in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, would live up to her high expectations – but quickly encountered even more drama than she had bargained for

DANGERS AND DELIGHTS AT ALIWAL

DRIVING INTO THE QUIET seaside town of Umkomaas, some 30 miles south of Durban, it quickly became clear that there is only one reason to visit this sleepy and seemingly deserted town – diving.

A town of this size boasting more than 15 dive operators and a variety of accommodation – with any other type of entertainment a substantial drive away – raised our expectations even further.

We had come to one of the most popular dive destinations in South Africa, the Aliwal Shoal, which was waiting for us three miles or so offshore. The reef is named after British ship the *Aliwal*, which very nearly struck it in 1849.

After the near-collision, Captain James Anderson wrote a letter to warn other ships of the "very large and dangerous" uncharted reef. For the next 100 years it remained unexplored, but when recreational divers did begin to visit in the 1950s, its reputation soon spread.

As we clambered onto the 8m RIB, our skipper Keith handed out life-jackets and told us to tuck our feet into the foot-straps, warning us that we were in for a bumpy ride. And what a ride!

The boat carefully wound its way around the Mkomazi river-mouth to find its best route out to sea. Suddenly, Keith revved the twin 85 Yamaha engines and we raced towards the ocean, battling through the breaking surf.

Gripping the rope tightly, I was forced by the waves repeatedly slapping me in the face to squeeze my eyes shut.

When I managed to blink the stinging salt water from my eyes, I saw the divers on the opposite side of the boat doubled up and shaking with laughter. I was on the "wet side" of the boat, and they were as dry as a bone. Not for long!

ENERGISED BY OUR exhilarating start, we were ready to drop down the descent line for our first taste of Aliwal Shoal.

The remains of a bed of sand-dunes from thousands of years ago, this rocky reef is nearly a mile wide and three miles long, running north-south along the inner edge of the Mozambican current.

Inhabited by many kinds of coral and a huge array of marine life – including large predators such as grey nurse sharks – the area was given protected status in 2004.

We started at one of the most popular dive-sites, the Cathedral. With a maximum depth of 27m, divers can't spend too long in the cave before reaching no-decompression limits.

But it's quality, not quantity, that counts, and even a short time spent at this site will reveal something amazing.

The water temperature was around 22°C and the visibility 12-15m, although we were unlucky to have just missed several days of 20m-plus vis. We settled at the base of a huge archway, the natural entrance to an open-roofed cave, to look for sharks, rays, cuttlefish and other species common here.

My buddy was watching a shark several metres away outside the cave – his first-ever shark sighting.

Pointing excitedly to the undulating tail disappearing into the distance, he was blissfully unaware of a much closer sighting less than a metre behind him.

I pointed, he turned, and a flurry of bubbles burst from his regulator as he came face to face with a huge, grinning mouthful of fearsome teeth.

This was the star of the show – and what divers come to Aliwal to see – a 2m grey nurse shark. The locals know them as raggedtooth sharks, or raggies, after the three rows of sharp, jutting teeth that protrude from their mouths like cactus spines. They swim with mouth open, so my buddy saw an impressive display!

Above: Striped grunters and raggedtooth sharks at the Cathedral.

Right: Sharks mill around close to the dive-boat.

KEITH TUGGED THE BUOY ROPE TO TELL US TO ABORT THE DIVE

ALIWAL DIVE CENTRE

Despite its formidable appearance, this is a relatively docile species of shark, and no human fatalities have ever been reported.

Sadly, however, the species is listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources, which means it is at high risk of extinction.

THE SIGHT OF OUR FIRST raggies wasn't to be the most dramatic part of our dive, however. The huge grins on our faces as we ascended were swiftly wiped away as we realised that someone was missing.

While we had been swimming with the sharks, a diver had become separated from the group and ascended on her own. Watching from the boat, Keith had noticed one bubble stream going in a different direction, and was surprised to see a diver surface only moments later.

We had been diving at around 26m, so she must have shot up like a rocket.



SIMON LORENZ

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SIMON LORENZ

As he helped her to clamber into the boat and checked that she was OK, her buddy surfaced too. Seeing that she was back safely on the RIB, he returned to the group to tell our instructor she was OK.

But very soon after that, Keith tugged the buoy rope to tell us to abort the dive – first once and then, as we were still taking our time to ascend, several times more, urgently.

On reaching the surface, the diver had assured Keith that she was OK and had not come up too quickly. But once on the boat, she seemed confused and admitted that she didn't know at what speed she had come up, only that it was fast.

She also complained of feeling nauseous and having a sudden, terrible headache. Recognising the obvious signs, Keith acted instantly.

Decompression illness. It's something every diver is trained to avoid, and here we were coming face to face with exactly why.

FIGHTING THE HUGE surface swells, we tried to haul our kit, and ourselves, back onto the boat as quickly as we could. A sense of urgency hung over us as we sped back across the rough seas.

One diver leant over the side, blood pouring from his nose as he tried to stem a nosebleed. His buddy, struck by seasickness, retched and gagged over the other side.

But however bad the vomiting, it couldn't come close to the bends.

The casualty was curled in the foetal position, clutching her head in agony.

Luckily, she was still conscious and responsive. Our dive-instructor Riaan fitted her oxygen mask while Keith radioed for an ambulance.

We had to get her back to the shore for medical treatment as soon as possible, and tore through the waves with no regard for finding the smoothest route.

Clutching the rope and dodging flecks of vomit, I fixed my gaze on the horizon, desperate to fight off nausea.

The mouth of the river had closed, so we had to ram the RIB straight onto the banks of the shore. The wind tore at our hair and faces as we got up to top speed, fast enough to slam the boat straight into

WE HAD TO RAM THE RIB STRAIGHT ONTO THE BANKS OF THE SHORE

the sandbanks. We jumped out and carried the injured diver to where the ambulance, and her fraught parents, were waiting.

A few days later we heard that the diver had been discharged from hospital. She had spent several hours in the chamber and a couple of days in intensive care.

We can't praise Keith and Riaan enough for their professional, quick behaviour. In an intensely stressful situation, they stuck to their training and did everything they needed to do.

They definitely deserved a few beers (or something stronger) in the bar that night.

The BSAC *Diving Incidents Report* for 2014 showed that "*most of the incidents reported… could have been avoided had those involved followed a few basic principles of safe diving practice.*"

We still don't know exactly what happened, but this experience reminded us of the importance of sticking to your training!



ALIWAL DIVE CENTRE

Above and left: Grim-toothed grey nurse sharks, or raggies, the stars of the show at Aliwal Shoal. Raggie season is between June and November.

MEMORABLE FOR FAR BETTER reasons, our second dive was at Raggie's Cave. At a maximum depth of 18m, its caves, gullies, swim-throughs and spectacular raggie viewing area make it one of the most popular sites at Aliwal.

Despite being out of raggie season, there was still plenty of life. As well as the grim-toothed raggies, we found a pair of lobsters lurking in the crags of a rock, several surly-looking, venomous stonefish, and an impressive shoal of dusky sweepers.

Not to mention the large blotched sting rays wriggling under the sand to conceal themselves. Or the giant moray – the biggest I've ever seen – with two cleaner shrimp in its menacing jaws.

Just beyond the moray, the sand began to squirm and a guitarfish emerged and darted away as we approached.

After watching a hawksbill turtle determinedly battling the surge, swaying back and forth as it tried to munch on food it had found in the crevice of a rock, we were getting low on air and it was time to ascend.

A few metres from the surface, we heard the distinctive clicks and squeaks of dolphins. We tried desperately to follow the sounds, but they remained just out of sight until the noises faded into the distance. Admitting defeat, we returned to the boat.

As it's so incredibly rare to see dolphins on a dive, we tried not to be too disappointed.

But we received compensation during the week with sightings of boxfish, giant starfish, multi-coloured nudibranchs, white paperfish, Moorish idols, needlefish and ember parrotfish, to name only a few.



RYAN DALY

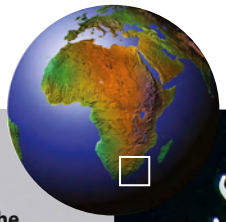


ALIWAL DIVE CENTRE

From top: Potato bass; moray eel; tiger anemones.

OUR FINAL DIVE was quiet compared to the rest of the week, though not literally so – on several occasions during our week at Aliwal we had heard the booms of what we at first thought was a revving boat engine. We now knew that these rumbles accompanying our dives were whale song.

Despite the impressive soundtrack, we saw very little other than one last raggie, and it didn't hang around for long.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▸▸ Aliwal Shoal lies off the coast from the town of Umkomaas. The closest airport is Durban's King Shaka International, 22 miles north of Umkomaas. SA number of airlines fly there from the UK, and Condor flies direct.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ Aliwal Dive Centre has been established for more than 15 years and offers daily charters to Aliwal Shoal. Accommodation is available at the Lodge, www.aliwalshoal.co.za

WHEN TO GO ▸▸ Diving conditions are good almost all year round. The legendary Sardine Run takes place in June and July, and raggie season is between June and November.

CURRENCY ▸▸ Rand.

PRICES ▸▸ Aliwal Dive Centre & Lodge offers a two-night, three-dive package with a double *en-suite* room with breakfast from R2940 (about £170). Oonasdivers can provide a SharkWeek package including flights to Durban via Dubai, six nights' stay and 10 dives at Aliwal Shoal and Protea Banks from £1450, www.oonasdivers.com

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.southafrica.net



ALIWAL DIVE CENTRE

As it swished its tail and disappeared behind a rock, we heard again the tell-tale sounds of dolphins. We looked around desperately, knowing that the pod would be tantalisingly just beyond our 12m vis reach. Would we be disappointed again?

Suddenly there was a flurry of movement, as 20 tails whizzed past us. Despite the number of dolphins we had glimpsed on the surface from the boat during the week, we hadn't expected to be lucky enough to see them under water.

Kicking our fins frantically, we were able to swim alongside and keep them in sight for a fraction longer.

But they were in no mood to play for long, and we were soon left gazing after them, our giggles of delight creating a cloud of bubbles.

It was the perfect last dive in South Africa (for now). Ascending to the reverberations of whale song, I was already wondering how soon I might be able to return to the incredible Aliwal Shoal.

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BE THE CHAMP!



DIVER rarely shows pictures of divers touching marine life, but photogenic grouper can sometimes be an exception, and ALEX MUSTARD explains why in his latest master-class. Hero fish can be extremely friendly!

*'When on these dives, I have been left in **no doubt** that the **grouper** are the **instigators** of the **interactions**'*

AS UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS, we've never had it so good. If you have any doubt, check out Mike Busuttili's article *50 Years Behind The Lens* in last month's DIVER, which chronicled the severe challenges that faced those who competed for the title of Underwater Photographer of the Year at Brighton in 1965. A personal highlight of attending the London International Dive Show in February was hearing Phil Smith, who won that title, speak.

Diving gear and particularly underwater photographic equipment has evolved so much that photographers are increasingly looking to tricky techniques, such as use of snoots or off-camera strobes, to make it harder for themselves but to make their pictures stand out.

Our underwater cameras are now incredibly reliable. I have never had any of my Subal housings serviced and neither they nor my Nikon SLRs have ever flooded or stopped me shooting over thousands of dives.

Despite the fact that the ocean's wildlife has been severely damaged by industrial-scale fishing and other human activities, we now see far more than the divers in the 1960s.

Fifty years of underwater exploration means that we really know how to find most subjects. Want to see thresher sharks, sperm whales or ornate ghost pipefish? A specialist dive travel agent can tell you not just where, but when.

The diving world is our oyster, or pygmy seahorse, or whale shark.

FROM THE 1960s to the 1990s, grouper were one of the most sought-after underwater subjects. Divers and photographers still love grouper, but their lure is not as great because we've learned to find bigger and more exotic subjects with regularity.

This month, I want to put them back in the spotlight and discuss how to make the most of them photographically.



Grouper are slow-moving, curious, intelligent and often highly colourful. They are long-lived fish and in many areas individuals become so infatuated with divers that they follow them around, which is music to the ears of any snapper.

Many dive-sites around the world have resident grouper, and their big eyes and rubbery lips give them a cartoonish charisma that seems only to be emphasised through a wide-angle lens. The result is pictures brimming with personality.

Above: In several locations around the world, grouper seek out divers for a tickle.

Taken in the Bahamas with Nikon D4 and Sigma 15mm fisheye. Subal housing. Seacam 150 strobes. ISO 320, 1/125th @ f/14.

STARTER TIP

Just because a friendly grouper will swim close enough to fill our frame, we don't have to photograph it like that. If a grouper is following you around, swim ahead and set up a pretty reef scenic and wait for it to swim into frame and complete a stunning image.

At a number of destinations in the Caribbean, Nassau grouper are notably friendly and pester divers for a stroke or tickle. I guess it gives them the same pleasant sensation as the actions of a cleaner fish.

Dives in San Salvador in the Bahamas and Little Cayman are classic examples.

I am not a fan of touching marine life, but when on these dives, I have been left in no doubt that the grouper are the instigators of the interactions.

And as a photographer I have no problem in documenting this fantastic connection between man and fish.

Even if you'd rather just look than touch, the grouper still come incredibly close. Their favourite trick is to sneak up on your blind side and suddenly appear inches from your mask.

Photographically, this means close-focus wide-angle techniques, with an ☛

Pictured: A hero fish enlivens our wide-angle scenic like no other.

Taken in Thailand with Nikon D2X and Nikon 12-24mm. Subal housing. Subtronic Alpha strobes. ISO 100, 1/30th @ f/80.





Above: Grouper love a good clean. Cleaning stations often allow a very close approach, but stay at a distance that keeps the mouth open for impact.

Taken in Little Cayman with Nikon D7100 and Tokina 10-17mm fisheye. Subal housing. Inon Z240 strobes. ISO 200, 1/30th @ f/14.

ultra-wide lens and strobes pulled in tight, but still behind the port, to light the subject when it is right on the glass.

Having a big fish trying to squeeze between you and your camera can be a distraction, and I find successful shots require pre-dive planning.

DEDICATED GROUPER DIVES, where we can see many individuals, are possible at a number of sites around the world, such as Cod Hole on the Great Barrier Reef and Grouper City in the Lavezzi islands between Sardinia and Corsica. These sites boast aggregations of massive grouper, which will swim among the divers.

The best shots here are encounter images, emphasising the size of these fish, with the help of a little forced perspective.

The key ingredient is getting the grouper between you and your buddy, which with a wide lens will make the grouper look huge and the diver small.

On these action-packed dives, I always try to float a little above the seabed to minimise backscatter. Excited divers and excited fish can stir up a lot of bits!

My favourite way to photograph grouper is to use them as a focal point for a reef wide-angle shot.

We should count ourselves lucky that one of the commonest grouper is also one of the most beautiful of all fish. Coral grouper, red with blue spots, are found on reefs throughout the Indo-Pacific, but are particularly abundant in spots such as the Red Sea, west Thailand and Raja Ampat.

WIDE-ANGLE REEF PHOTOS often take quite a lot of fiddling about with lighting. Photographers might stick in one place for five minutes or more to perfect the shot.

The result is a pretty scene but no fish, as they have long since departed. The solution, having refined the lighting, is to swim away for a minute, let the fish return and shoot again.

On the right reefs, we might get lucky and be able to include a large eye-catching fish as a centrepiece for the composition. We call these hero fish, as they are the main protagonist of the picture and can transform the appeal of a scenic image. Grouper are the kings of hero fish. We can use them on any reefs that are rich in grouper.

Sadly, grouper are not common everywhere these days. For many people these fish are high in protein, low in saturated fat and particularly tasty cooked on the barbecue. And grouper numbers have suffered.

But these fish have shown the power of recovery, when given a chance.

Kurt Amsler, top dog at the Brighton Festival in 1987, told me: "Near my home in the south of France, 25 years ago, it was very hard to find a grouper. But the French were wise enough to ban fishing and introduce marine parks. Every year for the past 20 years, there are more grouper. Now there are lots of dive-sites with 20 or 30 grouper."

Sometimes we can have the best of the past and the present.

MID-WATER TIP

On action-packed grouper dives, model eye-lines are really important. If your buddy is looking at the grouper in your photo the subject is re-emphasised, but if they are looking out of frame at a grouper out of shot, their presence will be a distraction.

Well worth mentioning this just before the dive!

ADVANCED TIP

Grouper love a clean – I guess they have sensitive skin! Check cleaning stations for grouper, especially on the first dive of the day.

Mouth-open shots are the most dramatic, so keep your distance initially and be patient. An open mouth quite small in the frame will out-do a closed mouth filling the picture – because it doesn't.

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the GOOD the BAD & the UGLY



NIGEL WADE travels to St Vincent to see if it lives up to its 'Critter Capital' billing, but his trip is not all sweetness and light



ENIGMATIC CAPTAIN Jack Sparrow sails his slowly sinking skiff past a rock arch. Suspended by a hangman's noose in the middle are three long-gone corpses, sentenced to death for swashbuckling.

Tattered clothes dangle from their skeletal remains. Hanging alongside them, a painted wooden sign reads "Pirates Ye Be Warned". A message for ancient buccaneers, or should it be taken as a warning for present-day visitors that there are scoundrels on this island? I was soon to find out!

I was visiting the picturesque volcanic Caribbean island of St Vincent, used as a base for cast and crew while filming Walt Disney's blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean, the Curse of the Black Pearl.*

This movie location was grounded in historical fact: St Vincent and the Grenadines had been no stranger to pirates in the 17th and 18th centuries.

On my very first day I had fallen prey to what seemed like modern-day piracy. I had left my dive-bag outside the hotel's dive centre and walked back to my room to collect my camera gear.

Ten minutes later I was back, but the bag and its contents were missing.

Hotel security staff combed the area, and a policeman arrived dressed in flamboyant T-shirt and Adidas jogging bottoms to take a statement.

His demeanour told me that this wasn't an uncommon occurrence, and that I was unlikely to be reunited with my much-loved and expensive dive-gear any time soon.

Undaunted, I decided not to let this incident ruin my trip. I would use rental kit and dive in a T-shirt and swimming shorts, although the thought of wearing ill-fitting full-foot budget fins offering snail-like propulsion filled me with trepidation.

Serenity Dive owner and PADI staff instructor Vaughn Martin was our skipper and guide for a six-day package of two morning dives a day on nearby sites around the western coast of the island.

Vaughn is a Vincentian of Dutch heritage. His large frame and Afro-Caribbean complexion seemed at odds with his piercing green eyes as we entered the warm water on the northern flank of the bay. A lone dwelling painted in rosy pastel hues stood on stilts at the tip of a lush green hillside above us, lending this site the name Pink House Reef.

The reef was spread out over a boulder-strewn seabed sloping gently away from the shore. The shallower depths were bathed in the morning sun as prism-like ripples of light skipped across the rocks and hard coral surfaces.

Clusters of almost fluorescent yellow tube sponges grew with impunity alongside deep crimson, purple, pink and green sponge formations. Pristine gorgonian fans provided shelter for some of the smaller reef inhabitants.

Pictured: Buccament Bay Resort, with its imported white sand beach.



Bright red- and silver-flanked big-eye squirrelfish used the numerous pink barrel sponges for their daytime hang-outs, sharing them on occasion with large lionfish.

Vaughn had told us that the normal 30m visibility had been reduced by the previous day's rain discharging from a small river into the bay – and there was me thinking that the 20m vis had already exceeded expectations.

This was one of the most prolific sponge gardens it's been my pleasure to dive. The bonus was that it was teeming with small colourful fish, taking my mind off what had been a poor start to the day.

Back on the boat, I talked to Vaughn about the Caribbean's invasive lionfish, prompted by seeing some dozen large specimens on the previous dive, looking well-fed, healthy and as bold as brass.

He told me that he felt it was his duty to remove as many as he could to help protect the native fish stocks from these beautiful but ferocious hunters.

Lionfish have no natural predators to fear in these waters, and the prey fish don't recognise them as predators. "It's win-win for the lionfish" said Vaughn. "Dive operators and conservationists throughout the Caribbean are trying to reduce numbers by spearing the fish and taking them home for the pot.

"Also, by feeding a few individuals to native species like moray eels, we hope they get a taste for the lionfish flesh and naturally prey on the aliens to redress the balance." (see Alex Mustard's *Licence to Kill*, February 2014)

Vaughn doesn't normally hunt for lionfish when he has guests on board, but he accepted my request to demonstrate how it was done.

At our next dive-site he showed me his weapon of choice – a spear, home-made from a glass-fibre shaft with straightened barbed fish-hooks fixed to the end, a loop of surgical latex tubing providing the firing mechanism.

To contain the catch and provide protection from the fishes' poisonous spines he had a large tub, made from a cut-down water-cooler bottle.

The lid had slots that radiated from the centre to create a lobster trap-type seal. Comically, the tub had been labelled "LCU" (Lionfish Containment Unit).

Layou Wall was our hunting ground. It wasn't long before my buddy Stuart Barry found a large specimen hovering over a barrel sponge. Vaughn tensioned the latex and aimed the spear at the fish's head – boom! It was over in a fraction of

Pictured: Ecologist Angela Picknell searches for the critters.

a second, the fish dispatched as quickly and humanely as possible before being safely deposited in the LCU.

It didn't take long to fill the tub; the lionfish were prolific here, thriving in their new home. Back at the surface we found a local fisherman on a tiny raft, hook-and-line fishing over the reef to feed his family but seemingly having a lean day, with a meagre catch of two small wrasse. Vaughn offered him the contents of the LCU, which he accepted with a gap-toothed smile.

THE WATERS AROUND St Vincent have been dubbed "Critter Capital of the Caribbean", and I was keen to see if this was fact or hype on our second day out.

Orca Wall seems to promise encounters with large black-and-white marine mammals, but we were here to hunt its nooks and crannies for little creatures. The wall, like the previous day's reefs, had prolific sponge growth interspersed with hard and soft corals.

Dense shoals of chromis hugged the contours, moving into open water *en masse* to feed on drifting plankton.

Curly tentacle anemones provided homes for tiny blue Pederson shrimps. Their cousins, the banded cleaner shrimps, advertised their services at stations set up among the sponges, and a white-mouthed moray lay relaxed and prone, ready for a wash-and-brush-up.

Juvenile angelfish displayed their black and yellow livery as sharptail eels hunted the reef for a meal.

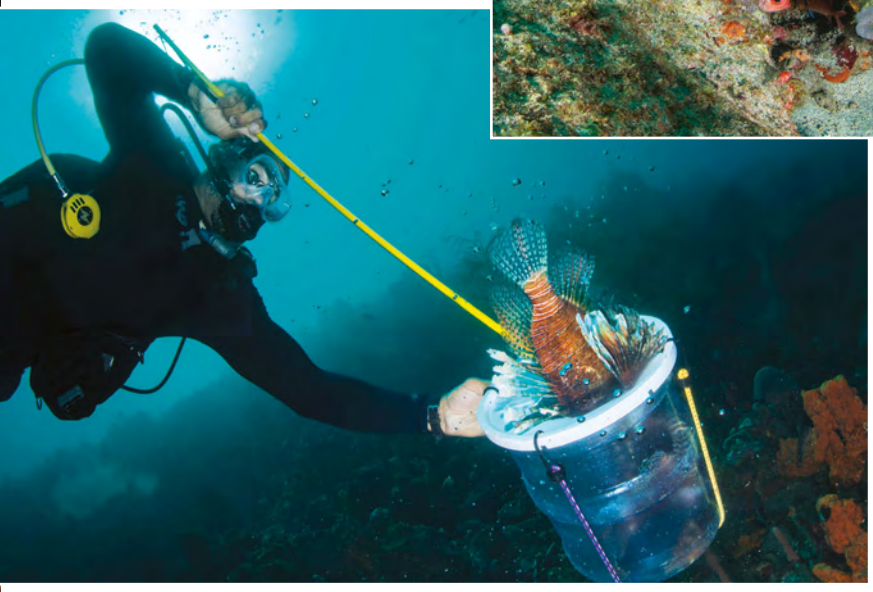
Tiny blennies peered from holes in the coral, and stinging bearded fireworms crawled over gorgonian branches.

Vaughn signalled for me to join him as he gesticulated wildly at a scruffy-looking piece of yellow sponge.

I sauntered over to find that the sponge was in fact an impeccable little frogfish, so well camouflaged that I had trouble seeing it at first. Its front fins gripped the sponge tightly as it lay and waited patiently for us to move on.







Top: Juvenile angelfish with yellow livery.

Above: Creole wrasse and chromis don't see lionfish as a threat. How wrong they are!

Left: After Vaughn Martin has dispatched a lionfish it's placed in the 'LCU'.

In contrast to the vibrant reefs, our next destination at Petite Byahaut consisted of a shallow bay with fields of eelgrass growing on the sandy seabed. Sparse sponge and coral outcrops were dotted among the grass.

Our critter dives would continue here, with seahorses and more frogfish our target species. Divemaster and sharp-eyed guide Angela Picknell, resident ecologist at Serenity Dive, had joined us. She has an enviable reputation for finding the bizarre and wonderful populace of the local reefs.

It wasn't long before Angela found a large seahorse hiding in the thick fronds of grass, its tail tightly wrapped around a sponge with the same colour and texture as its skin.

Secure in the thought that its camouflage rendered it invisible, it sat facing me with snout turned down, eyes glaring red as if angered by my intrusion.

Flying gurnards, slipper lobsters, damselfish, small shrimps and crabs completed the list. The critter claim seemed to be founded on fact.

The following day, a family from the UK joined us. On a cruise around the Caribbean islands, they had booked a snorkel trip with Serenity, and the youngest member, Leo, was bursting with excitement to get into the water.

'WHY ARE THERE SO MANY BLUE FISH AND ARE THERE SHARKS?'

Kitted out with a junior-sized mask and snorkel and a pair of Mothercare inflatable armbands the five-year-old was first in, his squeals of delight clearly audible through his snorkel as he saw the prolific marine environment laid out below him.

The journey back was filled with his questions: "What were those yellow things and why are there so many blue fish and are there sharks and will they eat me"? This little guy was going to grow into an ambassador for the marine environment, I thought.

No dive trip would be complete without a few wrecks thrown into the mix, so we headed south to the capital port of Kingstown.

Sitting upright on the seabed at around 20m, the remains of the *Siemanstrand* lie adjacent to the wreck of the tugboat she struck before they sank together more than 30 years ago. Both wrecks are intact and covered in prolific marine growth, ☛

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Above: Seahorse gives Nigel Wade a baleful look.

Right: Little Leo was full of questions after his dip.

Below: White-mouthed moray.

the interiors accessible to suitably qualified and experienced divers.

A third wreck, an 18th century French frigate, sits a little deeper just off the harbour's reef wall. Try as we might, we couldn't find it, and had to be content to explore the more recent shipwrecks.

ST VINCENT IS THE LARGEST island in the country St Vincent & the Grenadines. It is volcanic, and its biggest volcano La Soufrière is still active, though it last erupted in 1979. This volcanic background gives rise to black-sand beaches and tree-covered coastal basalt rock cliffs that climb from the sea.

Local towns and villages feature brightly coloured properties sitting partially on stilts on the steep mountainous green terrain, giving the whole island a spectacular and pretty appearance.

War between the native Carib Indians and French and English colonials in the 17th and 18th centuries saw the country constantly changing hands until 1969, when it became the last of the Windward Islands to gain independence.

We were staying in a luxury, detached villa at Buccament Bay Resort, where imported sand provides the only white beach on the island.

The tourist industry seems still to be in its infancy compared to nearby Barbados, Grenada and St Lucia, with few resorts or holiday hotels from which to choose.

As with other Caribbean islands the beaches are public, with the locals enjoying access for subsistence fishing. Over three consecutive evenings I saw fishermen casting their huge nets off the beach at Buccament Bay.

Their fishing practices don't appear to be regulated, and Caribbean signature species such as grouper, eagle rays











Above, clockwise from top: Part of the ugly side of St Vincent – fishermen net the resort bay; bearded fireworm on a gorgonian; wreck of the *Siemanstrand*.

and turtles were conspicuous by their absence during our dives. It appears that most Vincentians have yet to realise the value of a live turtle in tourist dollars.

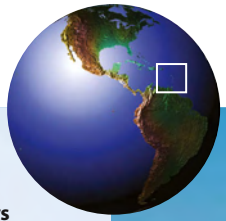
Whale sharks are a rarity in this part of the Caribbean. They don't have the protection offered to their Florida and Gulf of Mexico relatives through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) but they are on the list of species under threat.

So it was extremely upsetting to see fishermen who had recently harpooned a 5m adult dismember the huge dead fish with machetes in the surf-line of the resort's adjacent beach.

We witnessed the grisly scene as we were leaving for our return home, by which time I had packed my camera gear, but it was a bloody spectacle that I'll never forget.

The title of this piece sums up this trip. It was filled with good diving, the theft of my dive gear by bad people and ugly scenes of bloody slaughter on the beach.

St Vincent! It has it all, but some of it isn't for the faint of heart.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▸▸ Nigel Wade travelled from London Gatwick with British Airways to Barbados and transferred to Kingstown, St Vincent with Liat Airline, www.britishairways.com, www.liatairline.com

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ Serenity Dive, www.serenitydive.net, has a satellite base at Buccament Bay Resort, www.buccamentbay.com

WHEN TO GO ▸▸ Year round, although July to October is the wet season and prone to tropical storms. A high-factor sunscreen is essential, as is mosquito repellant in the wet months.

CURRENCY ▸▸ Eastern Caribbean Dollars (ECD). US Dollars and credit cards are widely accepted.

PRICES ▸▸ BA return prices to Barbados from £696 and Liat inter-island from US $270. Seven night all-inclusive packages at Buccament Bay Resort from £1399pp including ground transfers. Serenity Dive offers a two-tank dive for US $140 or a 10-dive package for $625, nitrox costs extra.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.discoversvg.com







THE IMITATION GAME

THE REEF IS SHAPED WITH DELICATE, rose-like petals; yellow-tinged edges with a darker centre. I blink at the coral, and the coral blinks back.

A tiny movement, perhaps the flaring of a breathing siphon, has unmasked the hidden octopus that sits curled, and perfectly disguised, at the centre of the coral rose.

A strange sub-aquatic stand-off takes place as we regard each other. The octopus can sense that I've seen it, but it stays quite still and pretends that I haven't. I know that the octopus is aware of me, but I'm staying quite still in an attempt to play along.

I suspect it's the unavoidable breathing that betrays us both.

The skin of the octopus, so wonderfully camouflaged to match the colour and texture of the coral, suddenly flushes a shade darker. It uncurls and slinks away backwards, its eyes locked onto mine. I follow as if in a trance.

The octopus retreats beneath a rock. When I tip my head to look under the rock, it picks up every pebble on the seabed and pulls them up into a protective screen across its entire body, as if shutting a door in my face. Nothing to see here – move along now! Ingenious.

Marine creatures can be pretty convincing when it comes to imitation: bits of coral, lumps of rock, strands of seaweed. Or even just a reflection of the surface. All very understandable if it helps them to hunt or stay alive.

So I was bemused to see the elaborate efforts of that starry pufferfish – featured in the March edition of **DIVER** – as it created a giant footprint in the sand.

HOW MANY ONE-LEGGED ELEPHANTS WEARING CREPE SOLES ARE OUT THERE?

What event is this fish trying to emulate? Just how many one-legged elephants wearing crepe soles are out there, trampling the ocean floor?

Distraction or attraction: whatever game is being played out under water, divers seem ill-equipped to join in.

If we were vaguely hoping to imitate some part of the marine environment so that we can better spy on the fish-life without freaking it out, we fail. We fail big-time.

To a fish, a scuba-diver sticks out as a random collection of flailing limbs strapped onto a metal can. And all those bubbles! It must make us sound like a bucket of spanners rolling down a hill.

We're just not discreet. Even the non-bubbling divers emit a series of bizarre mechanical sounds including, every so often, the kind of beeps that a microwave makes once your Pot Noodle has finished reheating. It's hardly the way to fit in.

I'm convinced that the only reason dolphins take any interest in divers is because they're just tickled that anything so raucously noisy and clumsily inept can even exist.

It's not that we're incapable of imitating something else. I've sometimes watched divers doing a very passible impersonation of underwater cyclists and over-sized yo-yos. Some even manage both, simultaneously.

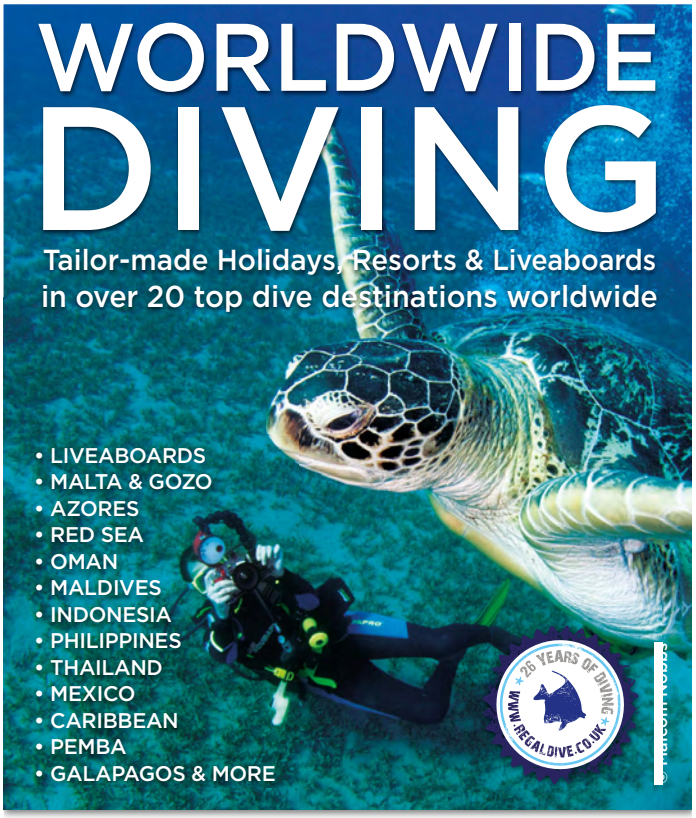
Wouldn't it be useful if this kind of behaviour proved attractive, rather than repellent, to sea-life? If only fish could develop a sense of humour, we'd all get along swimmingly.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. When it comes to the marine environment, I'm not sure that divers are capable of paying any compliments.

LOUISE TREWAVAS

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SEA MONSTERS



SCOTT CASSELL

Giant squid are creatures bordering on legend, and divers need to make a real effort to encounter them, but they're out there and in hard-to-imagine numbers, says JAMIE WATTS

MY RESPECT FOR SQUID – tinged with the fear of the unfamiliar – began years ago in the Red Sea's Na'ama Bay.

Snorkelling on a moonless night, away from the lights of what was then a small town, my torch-beam picked up a squid a little way offshore.

Not wanting to scare it, I glided smoothly and slowly out over deep water. I needn't have worried. The squid held its ground, and as I edged the beam towards it, it erupted in flashes of greens, blues, browns and oranges.

Its girth was a little bigger than my arm, it was as long as my leg, and from what I've been able to find out since, it was probably a rather large Loligo, one of an abundant group of inshore squids.

I was just over a metre away, looking at the unreadable, lidded iris, trying not to spook it and wondering if it would ink me as it ran away, when I was given a lesson in attitude.

The squid turned towards me, and suddenly its arms were raised and its tentacles poised to strike, as it flashed and flushed alarmingly.

Everything about this situation was at odds with the world I knew – the blackness around me, the depth beneath me, and my one point of reference beyond the edge of my comfort zone was an angry alien mass of glowing and flashing colours. The world I thought I knew suddenly didn't make sense.

I backed away hastily – if I had a tail, it would have been between my legs.

There's something deliciously compelling about anything as alien, ugly, beautiful and perhaps dangerous as squid, octopus and cuttlefish – the cephalopods.

Squid stand apart from their low-energy, bottom-dwelling cousins the octopuses and cuttlefishes. They are the spartan warriors of the seas, the one group of invertebrates that dares to rise into open water and take on the most advanced marine predators on Earth. And the squid may even be winning.

There are only around 300 species of squid. This is fewer than those of sharks or rays and a tiny fraction of the number of bony fish species.

If success is measured in terms of sheer numbers and combined mass, however, squid are far more successful than their closest ecological competitors the sharks, and many times more successful than their nemeses, the energy-hungry marine mammals.

Indeed, squid are the only serious competition to fish for dominance of the upper end of ocean food-webs.

In the past century we've done a pretty good job of stripping back medium-to-large fish populations, removing the competition and paving the way for the squid to dominate.



A SPLASH OF COLOUR

SQUID ARE KNOWN for flashing deep reds and occasionally other colours, although their repertoire can't match those of their cousins the octopuses and cuttlefishes.

The colour changes are made possible by the top layer of the white skin, which has hundreds of coloured cells (chromatophores) embedded in it.

If you look closely at the skin of a cephalopod you can see these individual pixels, which give the skin a grainy look.

Each cell can be squeezed to a pinprick by muscles in the white skin, or opened out and enlarged to a big vivid spot.

Different arrays in the skin give each squid a repertoire of five or so basic colour patterns. They lack the octopuses' and cuttlefishes' wider range of patterns, and their ability to change the texture of their skin to any significant degree.

The colour signalling of most squid is limited to angry dark red flashes, which squid themselves, lacking colour vision, see as shades of grey.

Shallow-living squid have mirror-like cells deeper in their skin, so can reflect green, blue and gold iridescent sheens.

The tiny deep-sea firefly squid puts on spectacular light and colour shows, including luminous flashes of several colours, and has evolved complex colour vision – unlike that of any other cephalopod – to go with them.

The skin patterns are used to confuse and startle predators and prey, to attract mates and to communicate in a very simple visual language something along the lines of "please don't eat me, let's have sex instead".

This is pretty important in fast

aggressive species in which other members of the shoal, rather than fat storage, are the communal food reserve for lean times.

As several males are often drawn to the same female during the one short mating season these animals ever have, a male may well have to signal to the female and at the same time be transmitting coloured threats to see off rivals.

If startling and confusing with colour doesn't work, then as divers and would-be predators have discovered, the animal can occasionally vanish behind a thick burst of ink.

Apart from confusing the vision, this can cause misleading or irritant smells and tastes, and may even act as an acoustic decoy to dolphins and sperm whales.

SPINDLE OF MUSCLE

EVEN BY CEPHALOPOD standards, squid are fairly simple physically.

They are spindle-shaped muscle-bags with a funnel under the chin for jet propulsion and fins at the rear for regular cruising, blending smoothly into a head with eight arms, with two long tentacles retracted inside them, ready to shoot out like a chameleon's tongue to grab prey at quite some distance.

I once watched a small Caribbean reef squid glide towards an unsuspecting fish almost its own size, and strike from two body-lengths away.

Squid have the fastest reflexes on Earth, more powerful musculature than almost any other animal and perhaps the most formidable armaments of any predator. Unlike the smooth "bath-mat" suckers on the tentacles of octopuses, squid suckers have lots of literally razor-sharp teeth.

As fast-moving predators in three dimensions, squid have complex balance sensitivity, and vibration-sensitivity similar to the lateral lines of fish.

They do not have the octopuses' advanced sense of taste, nor the cuttlefishes' vocabulary of displays, and lack the large brains and complex behaviour of their cousins.

Neither do any of them, as far as we know, have venom glands, as many octopuses and cuttlefish do.

They go for brawn, speed and aggression over sophistication.

This fast, reactive and predatory mass of muscle and nerves gets pretty scary from a diver's perspective in a handful of squids. About a dozen species, mainly from cold or deep waters rarely seen by divers, grow larger than a small dog, and at this size diving with them can become terrifying.

Fishermen have long known the Baja jumbo or Humboldt squid as *diablo rojo* – the red devil – and many divers have been slammed, grabbed and startled by them.

There have been a few sprained limbs, grabbed masks and regs, and at least two divers have been reported killed, with squid as the main suspects.

However, most divers report a fascination with the mesmerising colour flashes, and the slightly shy, nervous but curious behaviour of the squid.

LIVE FAST, DIE YOUNG

CEPHALOPODS ARE REMARKABLE in the briefness, intensity and efficiency of their short lives. Most live only a year, but in that time they become impressive predators, growing faster than any other complex animal. The secret is an incredible ecological conversion efficiency; the proportion of the food that is converted to body mass. If you like calamari, you can rest assured that the meat was produced far more efficiently than fish, beef or even chicken.

A handful of large coldwater cephalopods live up to three or four years, compared to the 20 or more for large fish, sharks and mammals, but because of their food-conversion efficiency, in that short time they can become giants.

One side-effect of such rapid growth is the need to change the prey chosen. Small cephalopods prefer crustaceans – shrimp, crabs etc – but larger species quickly work their way up the food web, out-growing successive types of prey.

A fish that may be a dangerous



Below: Fearsome tentacle club from a colossal squid examined by Jamie Watts.

Bottom: impromptu size comparison with a giant squid found off Java.

predator to a young squid may become a tasty morsel a few weeks later.

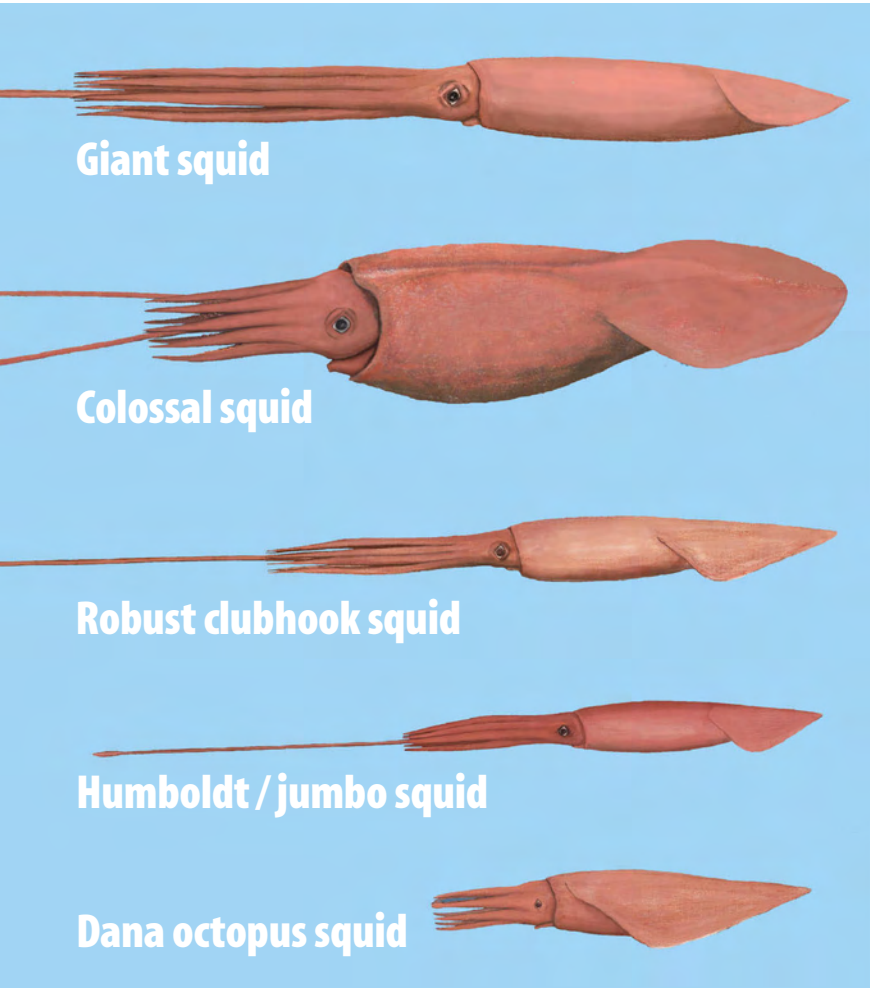
In some cases this may be what limits the growth of large cephalopods – they run out of a choice of things to eat. Colossal squid attack hooked toothfish as big as a human from longlines.

The downside to this rapid growth is that their protein-based metabolism demands a constant supply of food.

Squid are not built for storage or lean periods. They have to keep moving to where there is ample food, so are found in numbers only in cool, rich seas.

Squid move in larger groups than other cephalopods, and sometimes migrate long distances.

Migrating *en masse* gives them a handy reserve for lean times – jumbo squid and others cannibalise the smaller members of the school in the absence of alternative food on the way to the spawning grounds.



JAMIE WATTS

Left: Size comparison between the biggest octopuses and humans and the giant squid.



I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to examine what may well be the largest specimen (albeit partial) ever found of the colossal squid, *Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni*.

The tapering arms were as big around as a human arm, and a little over a metre long – shorter than those of the giant squid but much thicker and more muscular.

These arms surrounded the grapefruit-sized beak mass, and near the bases and the tips had simple suckers on stalks edged with small serrated teeth. These suckers alone cut small cookie-chunks from prey, but the middle of each arm has even more fearsome suckers.

These are again stalked, but offset, hanging away from the mouth and about the size of the end of a thumb. Each sucker has an inward-hooked tooth at the end and a smaller one either side, and so is basically a hook. The only way in which prey too weak to tear off the muscular arms can go is towards the beak.

As if this metre-long cone of death – effectively a massive mouth – was not enough, the two tentacles were nearly 2.5m long. In the living animal they may well have been able to shoot out and grab prey 4m from the mouth.

At the end of the tentacles were tentacle clubs, armed not only with even more of the pivoting, hooked suckers but with press-stud-like suckers and knobs designed to clamp the clubs together around the prey. This 8m giant is the largest and most powerful species of squid, but most squid are similarly armed, albeit on a smaller scale.

The giant squids may not be large enough to drag down ships, like the kraken of legend, but they are spectacular predators. They are also far more abundant on a global scale than other large predators such as dolphins, sharks and large fish.

Despite our failure to find live colossal squid (and divers are unlikely to meet them as they live deep below the roughest seas on Earth around inaccessible Antarctica) we know from the diet of sperm whales that this is one of the most abundant large animals, with literally millions of tonnes of biomass.

Longer but much less heavily built is the rare and still-elusive giant squid *Architeuthis*, found (very occasionally) almost worldwide.

Architeuthis has been recorded to 12m in length (most of which is the super-elastic tentacles) but is less than half the bulk of the colossal squid and a much less impressive predator, unless reports of 18m giants can be verified.

Scott Cassell, who has worked and dived with jumbo squid for years, attached a low-light camera to a dog-sized jumbo squid recently and captured a few tantalising seconds of a huge squid apparently hunting the jumbos, with at least an 8m arm spread, which would fit about right with a 15m-plus *Architeuthis*.

Both of these giants, particularly the colossal, have soft bodies, at odds with their tough, muscular arms. These bodies are somewhat buoyant and designed for gentle drifting, perhaps lying in wait for prey rather than fast swimming.

As the first-ever footage of giant squid attacking a bait trap showed a couple of years ago, however, they can still be impressively fast, active predators.

Slightly smaller than these giants but more muscular-bodied and more active swimmers are robust clubhook squid from the cold north Pacific and jumbo or Humboldt squid from the east Pacific.

The former grows to the size of a large adult human, the latter a little smaller.

Both can be found in diving depths at night, and are rightly considered to be potentially dangerous and unpredictable diving companions. Divers sometimes wear shark-suit type chain-mail and are tethered to the surface.

Diving with these squid is not for everyone, but as they generally live in deep, cold seas and only come to the shallows at night in a few key areas, you have to be trying pretty hard to be anywhere near these giants anyway.

DEATH OF A VIKING

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A FAN of the Viking saga *Beowulf*. Briefly, this story describes how Grendel, a terrifying monster, raided a Viking drinking hall and killed the warriors gathered there.

The warriors went on to Viking heaven, or Valhalla, while Grendel's anti-social activities ceased when Beowulf, a Viking chief, fought and killed him.

In my story the monster is not Grendel, but the very real and devastating storms of the winter of 2013/14.

The *Viking Princess* was a 20m trawler decommissioned as part of the reduction of the UK fishing fleet. She was stripped down, the Cummins diesel engine and prop removed and bows cut down to satisfy the conditions of the Fisheries Commission compensation scheme.

She was being towed to the breaker's yard on the River Dart when she was swamped and sank off the South Devon coast about five miles east of Plymouth, close to the mouth of the Yealm river.

My wife, Karen, found the then-mystery wreck in 2002 during a drift dive in the area known locally as Fairylands. The pine decking was still in place and there were empty paint-cans, discarded fishing-gear and other shipyard junk still below decks in the hold. It was actually possible to enter the hold via a hatch.

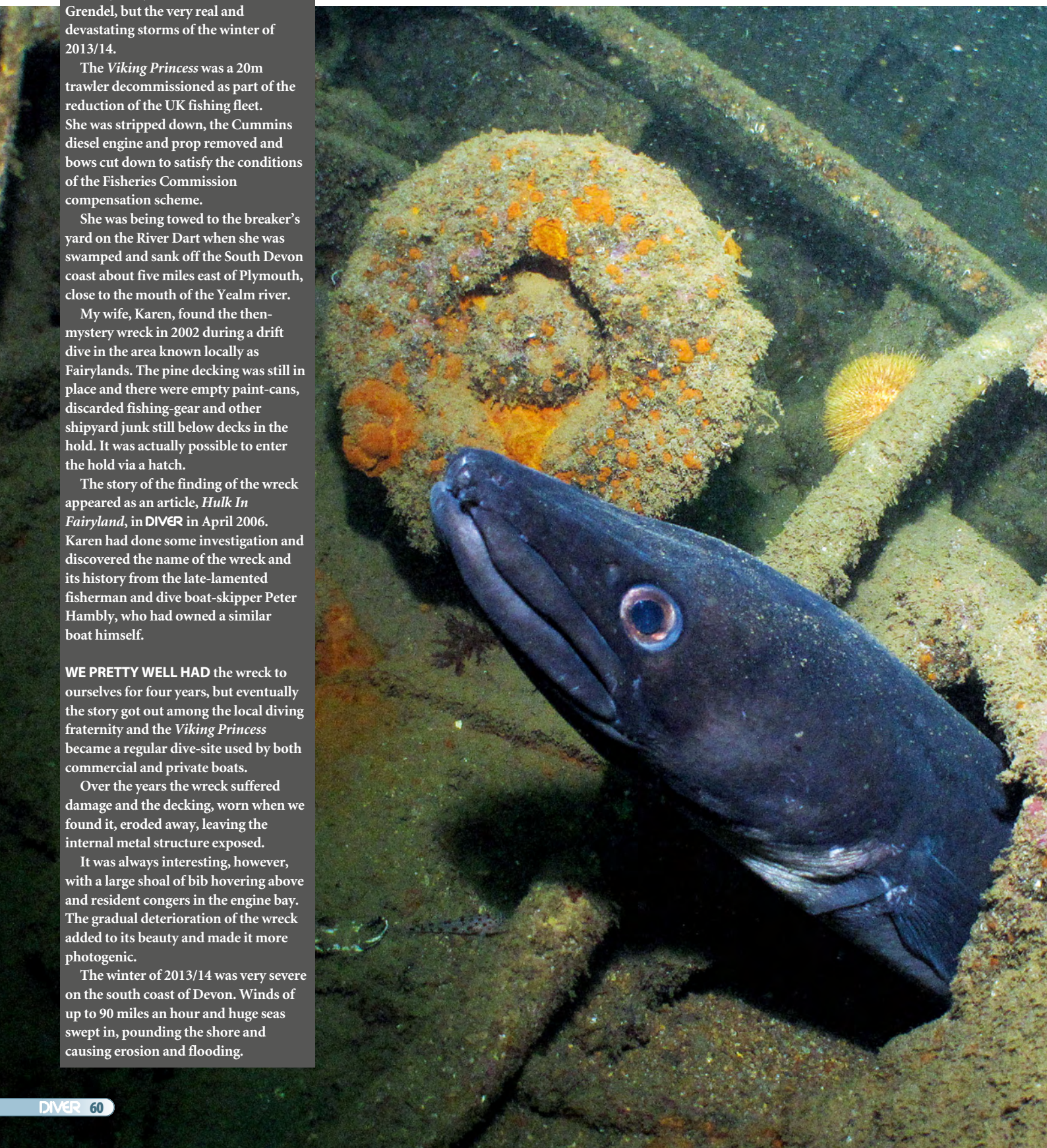
The story of the finding of the wreck appeared as an article, *Hulk In Fairyland*, in DIVER in April 2006. Karen had done some investigation and discovered the name of the wreck and its history from the late-lamented fisherman and dive boat-skipper Peter Hambly, who had owned a similar boat himself.

WE PRETTY WELL HAD the wreck to ourselves for four years, but eventually the story got out among the local diving fraternity and the *Viking Princess* became a regular dive-site used by both commercial and private boats.

Over the years the wreck suffered damage and the decking, worn when we found it, eroded away, leaving the internal metal structure exposed.

It was always interesting, however, with a large shoal of bib hovering above and resident congers in the engine bay. The gradual deterioration of the wreck added to its beauty and made it more photogenic.

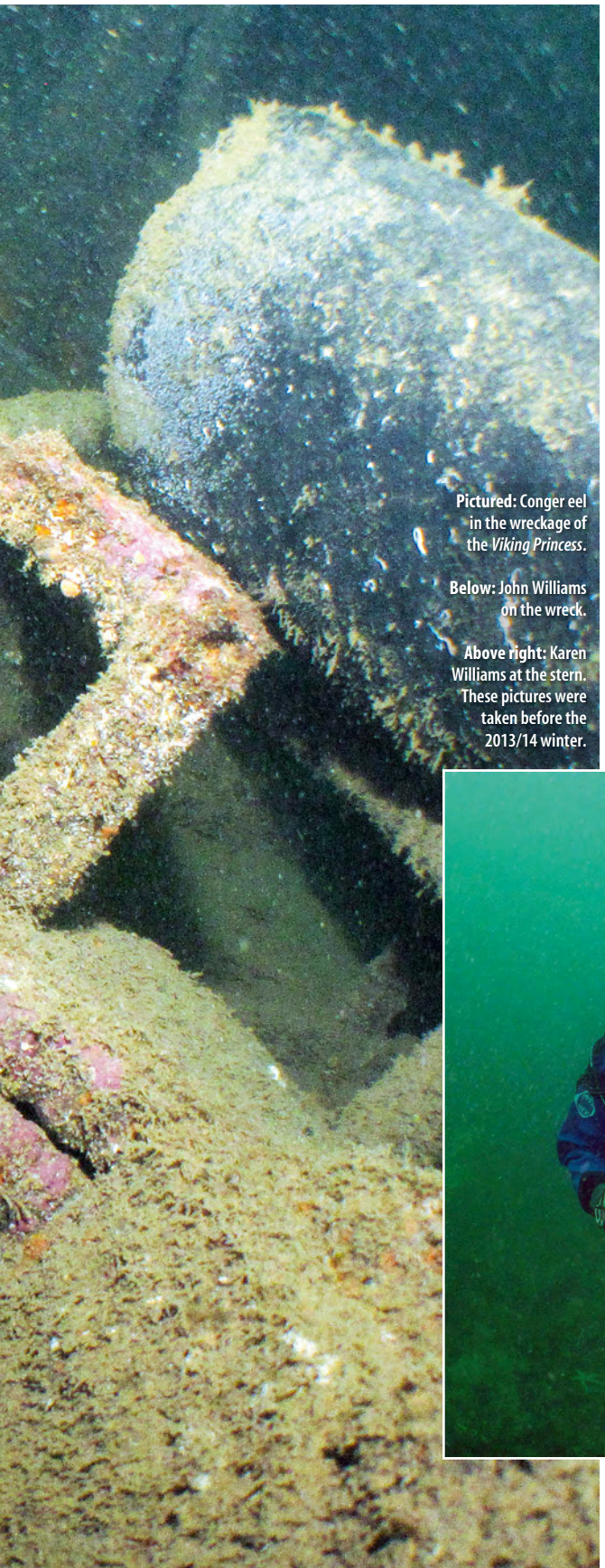
The winter of 2013/14 was very severe on the south coast of Devon. Winds of up to 90 miles an hour and huge seas swept in, pounding the shore and causing erosion and flooding.





JOHN WILLIAMS and his wife Karen had enjoyed having a wreck to themselves in UK waters – but nothing lasts forever

PRINCESS



Pictured: Conger eel in the wreckage of the *Viking Princess*.

Below: John Williams on the wreck.

Above right: Karen Williams at the stern. These pictures were taken before the 2013/14 winter.

Further along the coast, the railway was washed out at Dawlish, leaving the track hanging in mid-air.

Diving was off the agenda for some time. When we did get back into the water the sea had a milky appearance, probably because of the fine sediments on the seabed being ruthlessly stirred up in the storms.

As this settled, the May plankton bloom started and, although patchy, knocked back visibility.

I EVENTUALLY MANAGED to dive the *Viking Princess* again in July 2014. I had been told that it had suffered badly in the storms, but I had no idea how much damage had been done. Arriving at the site it was unrecognisable on the sounder; nothing seemed to be standing up very much from the bottom profile at all.

I even started to doubt the GPS location, as I was using a new plotter. Anyway, over went the shot and I dropped into a gentle tide and reasonable visibility.

On the seabed I couldn't see the usual "loom" of darkness that led to the wreck, nor was the shoal of bib to be seen.



Moving forward, I found a long-corroded metal plate lying flat on the seabed and, continuing, more pieces became apparent.

What astounded me was the degree of destruction that had occurred, considering that the wreck lies between 19 and 25m deep, depending on the state of the tide.

When I had last seen the wreck, it had been a recognisable vessel. A Kort nozzle was fitted to the stern, decking ribs were still intact and the engine-room still contained parts of pumps and pipework. ☛




View towards Fairylands from the *Viking Princess* site.

Moving on again, I found a short piece of one side of the hull smashed against a gully wall, and a section of the hull that looked as though it had come from the engine-room lying flat.

A conger with a very scratched nose partially emerged from its lair below this plate. Was it the same conger that Karen had photographed in 2013?

A small shoal of poor cod became apparent as I moved around the site looking for more wreckage, but the coherent wreck I remembered had been broken up into disjointed wreckage.

As I write this in January 2015 a force 8/9 gale is once again pounding the South-west. I wonder if there will be anything significant to see of the *Viking Princess* in the spring.

I hope so. It would a great shame if all traces of this *Viking Princess* disappeared into Valhalla like Beowulf's warriors with the ravages of that monster, the British weather. How many more wrecks will suffer the same fate this winter?

Incidentally, the local skippers had suggested that decommissioned fishing-boats could be sunk in Whitsand Bay, the current location of the *Scylla* wreck.

Regrettably, the scheme was turned down, and as far as I know all the boats went to breakers' yards.


From top: Rib anchor and plating on a recent dive; pouting on the wreck in 2012; the wreck-site last year.











Monty HALLS

'I'VE BEEN RESCUED TWICE WHILE DIVING'

I'VE BEEN FORTUNATE enough for the past couple of years to present the annual DIVER awards at the London International Dive Show. It's always fun, although it does mean that I have to perpetually rein myself in to avoid lapsing into a poor impersonation of Wossy at the Comedy Awards, or Billy Crystal hosting the Oscars.

The key with being behind the mike for any event like this is to remember that it's not about you, it's about the award winners. As such, my steady stream of off-colour jokes, bad impersonations, and excruciating puns has to be quelled.

This is not easy, let me tell you, and I'm seriously thinking of releasing the inner Les Dawson next year. This would increase the length of the awards ceremony to a respectable three hours, but the time would positively fly by, I'm sure. Well, it would do for me, anyway.

One of the recurring factors in presenting the awards is that many of the same names, brands and organisations appear again and again. This is no idle co-incidence as they all share the same characteristic of going the extra mile for their customers.

This is turn leads to the sort of loyalty that makes people get off their behinds and vote.

There are of course many, many fine brands out there – as divers today we're lucky to have a greater choice of gear and destinations than ever – but very few of them are "love" brands.

This is a slightly nauseating marketing term for brands that inspire unswerving loyalty and devotion in their followers. Non-diving examples include Virgin, Apple and, of course, Smeg. I'm talking about the fridges – shame on you.

The winners of the DIVER awards, year after year, are the closest we have to "love" brands, inspiring loyalty, devotion and a cult following among the diving fraternity.

BUT THIS PARADE of consistent excellence did get me thinking last time I did the awards. Much as I admire the industry leaders who were arrayed before me – and remember that I run a small eco-tourism business, and can only dream of being where they are one day – should there perhaps be a call to reward the unsung heroes of diving? And I don't use that term lightly.

I've been rescued twice while diving. Neither of these were particularly dramatic events – perhaps better terms would be "assisted" or even "strongly encouraged to sort my crap out".

In one of these incidents, it is without question that my buddy put her own life at risk to get to me.

I was diving in the Galapagos, and had reached the end of the dive, so was on the remnants of a single cylinder.

I was young, a madly enthusiastic underwater photographer and utterly, completely, immortal.

As I hung on the deco stop, with perhaps 30 bar left, I glanced down and saw the most staggering sight – hundreds and hundreds of cow-nosed rays sculling beneath me.

I immediately switched on my camera, switched off my brain (and how often is that a theme in diving nowadays) and turned down towards them. They were at a depth of, at most, 20m, but as I hurtled deeper they not unreasonably tilted a collective wing and slipped further into the gloom.

I followed, seeking the shot of my life (or death). By the time my buddy got to me, I was at 30m and plummeting ever deeper, chasing shadows and down to my last 10 bar.

My buddy, to her great credit as she also had very little air left, had followed me and managed to grab a fin.

She was, quite rightly, livid, and glared at me from a range of an inch and a half as I sheepishly buddy-breathed with her all the way to the surface.

That she put her life at risk was beyond question, and yet – aside from me buying her numerous drinks and ultimately marrying her (long story, no time to go into it here) – she never received any acknowledgment for following the finest traditions of diving to save her buddy's life in his moment of monumental folly.



THAT IS ONE TYPE of heroism, but of course there are different heroes, those we encounter every day in our diving lives. How about the life-long diving club servant, the one who tows the boat, cleans the clubhouse, organises the events, trains the newbies and raises the funds?

How about those beloved instructors who have introduced thousands of divers to the sport, in the process weaving themselves into the very fabric of diving folklore?

How about the local conservation legends, working with their own funds and own time to save a stretch of seabed?

I'd really like to see a "People's Award" for the DIVER presentations, and maybe even a "Gallantry Award".

The latter may sound histrionic, but I have witnessed many gallant acts in diving – it's defined as "nobility of spirit or action; courage" in the dictionary, and I think that's a fair description of what that girl did for me on that day so many moons ago in the Galapagos.

These could be voted for by divers – as are the other awards, I hasten to add – and would be treasured by the recipients forever.

DIVER Magazine has done more than most to reward achievement in our sport, so how about a people's prize or two?

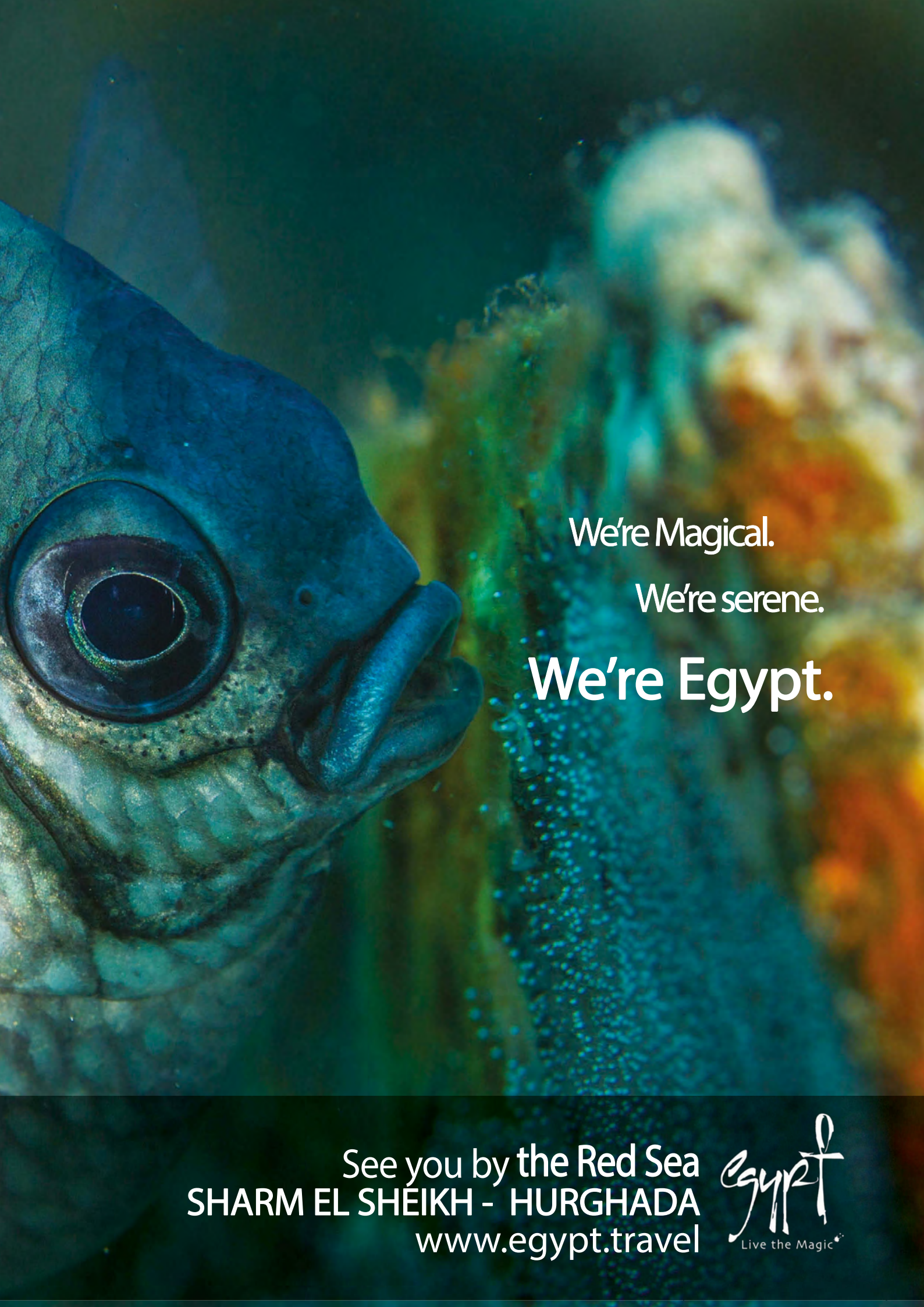
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At Oslob in the Philippines whale sharks are attracted by feeding, and the ring of spectators makes it all a bit 'Disneyland in full swing', says ANDREY NEKRASOV (who also took the pictures) and ALEXANDER KURAKIN. Still, our correspondents got the benefits too

GOOD-TEMPERED GIANTS

I HAD A LONG-HELD DREAM, one common to many underwater photographers, and that was to take photos of a whale shark.

And now here I am close to realising that dream, because snorkelling with whale sharks is down as part of a dive-tour programme in the Philippines.

We're woken at the crack of dawn and led to a bus. We will spend five hours travelling from Mactan in the northern part of Cebu island to the southernmost part of the island and a small town called Oslob. Most of the group are planning to have a sweet nap, but my thoughts about that long-awaited meeting with whale sharks won't allow me to sleep.

There aren't that many whale sharks left, and as they are spread over the vast oceans, we get the chance to see them only occasionally.

Until the beginning of the 19th century that privilege was limited to sailors voyaging in tropical and sub-tropical seas. This huge fish was said to be the Devil incarnate, thought to enjoy nothing better than overturning ships – and woe betide any seamen who



should find himself into the water with them, because they would gobble up such prey a dozen at a time.

Those were the views of uneducated medieval fishermen, but even the more contemporary traveller Thor Heyerdahl devoted these gloomy lines to the shark: "*The head belonged to a gigantic monster and it was so huge, so ugly that even the sea serpent, if it had appeared in front of us, wouldn't have impressed us so much. Little eyes were sat on the edges of a wide and flat snout, the toad's gorge with long fringe in the corners was no less than a metre and a half wide… Even Walt Disney's vivid imagination couldn't have created such a monster.*"

The size of the whale shark's gorge is impressive but modern scientists would raise strong objections to any suggestion of these huge fish ingesting an unfortunate swimmer. The whale shark might be colossal, but it has a pharynx only 10cm in diameter and an oesophagus that is joined to the stomach almost at right angles, which means that it cannot swallow long objects.

Besides, this shark is oriented to eat its natural food, krill, which is why it's always ready to close its gorge when a big object is nearby. Divers can disturb and may even try to ride whale sharks, in which case the fish's only (and quite sluggish) reaction is submersion to a depth beyond human capabilities.

This may interrupt the shark's feeding, so thinking of this, many countries in which shark-tourism flourishes have created strict rules about "non-contact" communication with the whale sharks.

In Oslob, feeders scatter krill in certain parts of the sea during daylight hours, and whale sharks come to be fed there as if it's some huge canteen. As they satiate themselves and leave, others take their places at the dining table.

I don't know what the maximum influx of "guests" is, but I saw about seven sharks at the same time. Counting the number of spectators contemplating the eating giants was less easy, in fact impossible.

A fleet of boats from the local dive-centres and hotels were circling the feeders' *bangkas* (local Philippine boats with outriggers), and dozens of scuba-divers, snorkellers and swimmers in life-jackets were landing from those boats.

Some were swimming cautiously at a distance, some striving to touch the ☛

Pictured: A whale shark feeds on plankton near an outrigger at Oslob in Cebu.

Above: The authors were snorkelling, but scuba-diving is permitted at this whale shark feeding site.



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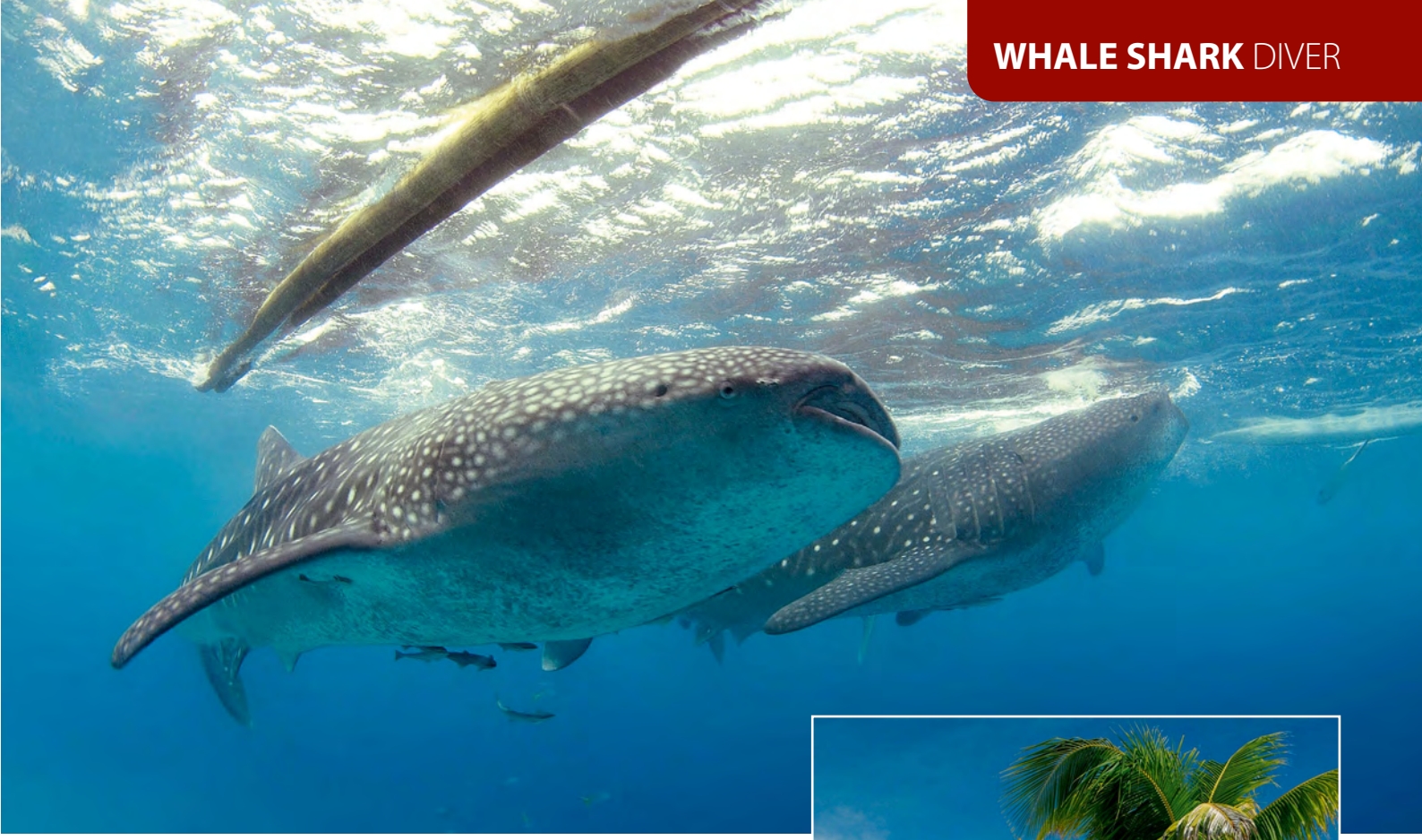
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sharks' rough skin, others showing off for the photographer, lining up alongside the sharks – it looked like Disneyland in full swing, though instead of the hubbub of a noisy crowd, all I could hear was the rustle of the scuba gear and the gurgling of bubbles.

The heroes of the day were of course the whale sharks, carrying themselves calmly as if they were the only creatures in mid-ocean. Imperiously they ignored the confusion of humanity around them – their natural grandeur made us feel small.

Initially the sharks coming in to feed themselves seemed huge, but as our emotions slowly levelled out it was possible to estimate their sizes objectively. There were "little ones" of 3-4m in length, but I would put the biggest at about 8m, young teenagers in whale shark terms.

According to scientists, puberty comes when the sharks are about 8-9m long and 30-35 years old. The highest estimates of whale shark age and size abandon strict scientific concensus and enter the brightly coloured realm of fishermen's stories.

THE MOST SCEPTICAL SCIENTISTS

measure a whale shark's natural lifetime to be around 70 years, while the more optimistic extend that to 100 years. Eyewitnesses have confidently stated that they have come across 150-year-old specimens. Scientists put the maximum size as 20m long and weight at about 34 tonnes, impressive enough, but the Internet is a kaleidoscope of tales of monsters weighing in at up to 40 tonnes!

The pattern of white transverse stripes and bright spots on the grey or grey-brown background of a whale shark's back looks picturesque. Coastal dwellers have come up with many names for the whale shark based on this colouring, so in South America it's called "domino"; in Madagascar "the one that has lots of stars"; on Java "a back of stars" and in South Africa "Father Shilling".

Scientists have found out that this pattern is as individual as human fingerprints and doesn't change as the fish grows up. This peculiarity is used to record sharks and to learn about their migration routes.

A whale shark comes to the feeder's boat and waits for the next portion to fall into the water, at which point it slightly opens its wide jaws, and the water rushes in with a murmuring sound.

If a camera comes too close to a shark's mouth, the owner will have to strain his or her arms to avoid the seething funnel engulfing it.



Top: Whale sharks congregate beneath a *bangka*, where plankton can be found.

Above: Dive-boat by the shore.

Left: The biggest of the whale sharks was 8m or so – the giants are rarely seen these days.

The whale shark needs from a couple of dozen to 100kg of food – plankton, small fish, squid or jellyfish – a day to fill itself, the amount depending on its size.

The density of plankton organisms in the oceans is not great (on average 4.5kg per cubic metre), so the whale shark has to filter huge amounts of water. Scientists confirm that this number can reach 6000cu m per hour.

The filtration process happens with the help of a fine sieve (the size of a cell can be of 1-3mm) made of gill arches, cartilaginous tissue and dermal teeth.

Whale sharks migrate seasonally to find more abundant hunting areas.

Once they have found fields full of plankton, the giants gather in big groups. In the Gulf of Mexico 420 specimens were detected in 2009 during a period of a mass fish-spawning (spawn is perfect food for whale sharks).

HERE IS ANOTHER SHARK coming up to the dining table. Having swallowed some food, it is disturbed by something (or someone), swerves dramatically and slips aside. Idlers who stay near its tail are literally "blown away".

It's true that a whale shark won't attack a human deliberately, but no one is immune in a situation in which people can be hit by a mighty tail. Whale sharks wiggle their whole body while moving, and a tail-fin can move with great force.

Besides which, sometimes a whale shark may ram fishermen's boats, not deliberately but because it isn't exactly eagle-eyed. The crew find themselves in the water, and marine folklore gets one more horrifying story about a dangerous sea monster.

I watch the sharks for 30 minutes, and notice that they differ not only in their appearance but in behaviour. While some try to be unobtrusive and wait their turn for food, brasher sharks jump the queue, the queuers behaving as if that's OK. It's evident that this community has its own hierarchy.

Whale sharks' behaviour may remain veiled, but their anatomy has been closely studied. They are known to be ovoviviparous, for example, developing eggs within the body, and those eggs become super-large – 60cm long and 40cm in diameter.

They are also extremely nutritious. In fact, the nutrient potential is so high that a baby shark leaving its egg doesn't need to eat for several weeks, yet still grows by a centimetre every day.

Whale sharks have not been studied by scientists for that long. In 1828 a "baby fish" 4.6m long, stricken near the South African coast, was studied and described by an English naturalist called Andrew Smith, but the fact that aspects of their lives remain opaque is probably down to the comparative rarity of the species.

Pictured: Whale sharks differ not only in their appearance but in their behaviour.

Right: A huge inrush of water as the shark filters out the nutrients.



A trade in whale sharks exists in south and south-east Asia (according to some sources, fins from about 1000 sharks turn up each year on the Chinese market), but fishermen are reluctant to pass their catches onto scientists.

Only about 300 are known to have been examined in detail over what is almost two centuries.

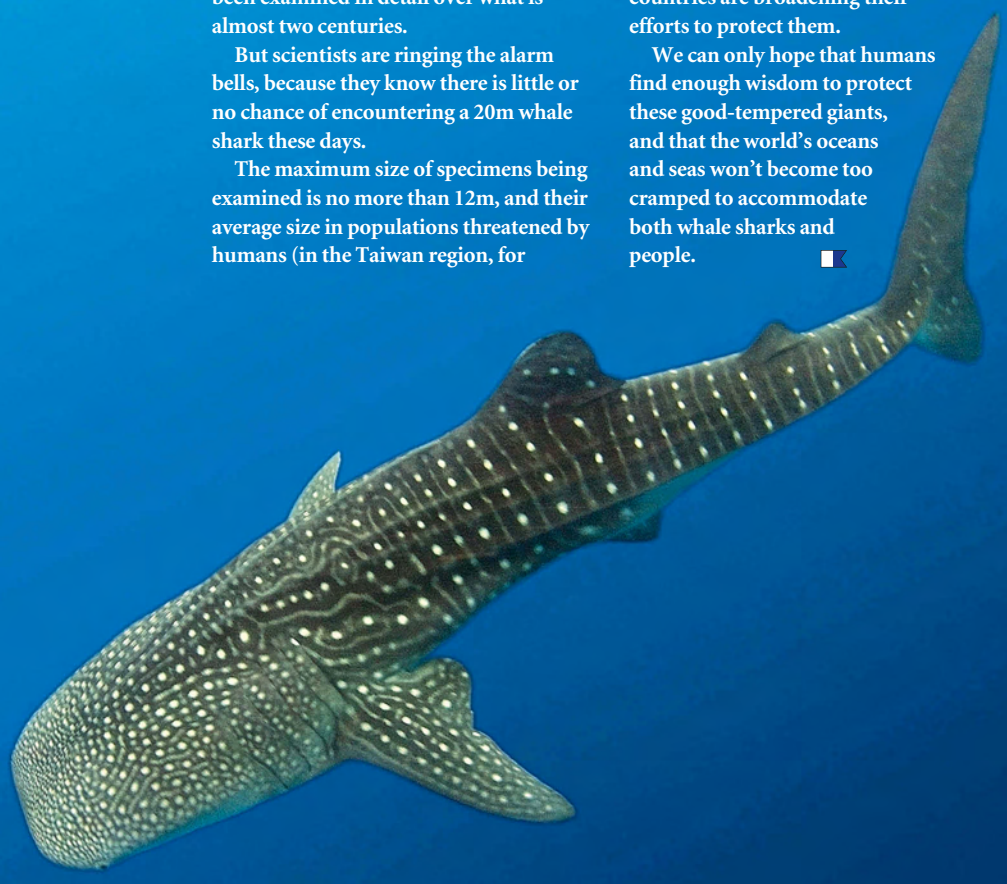
But scientists are ringing the alarm bells, because they know there is little or no chance of encountering a 20m whale shark these days.

The maximum size of specimens being examined is no more than 12m, and their average size in populations threatened by humans (in the Taiwan region, for example) has dropped below the 5m mark. This is a "baby fish" that will be able to reproduce only in 15 years or so from now.

That's why scientists are concerned that this unique species may vanish from the Earth before we have come to fully understand it.

Whale sharks are listed in the International Red Book, and many countries are broadening their efforts to protect them.

We can only hope that humans find enough wisdom to protect these good-tempered giants, and that the world's oceans and seas won't become too cramped to accommodate both whale sharks and people.

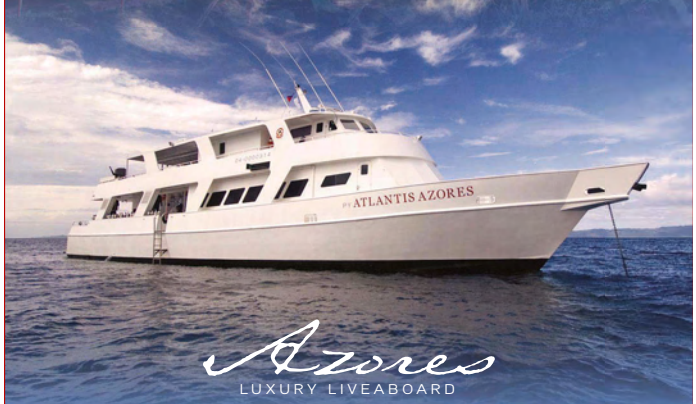


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The Adriatic off Croatia is littered with WW1 wrecks, and one of the best-known is the *Cesare Rossarol*. A team of keen GUE divers decided to map this Italian cruiser to help protect it – JEROEN VELTROP and PETER ZAAL report, photography by RENÉ LIPMANN





PROJECT

THE *CESARE ROSSAROL*

It is fully loaded with ammunition, the 109 crewmen hard at work. It is 16 November, 1918, the war is over and the Italian light cruiser is on her way from Pula to Cape Kamenjak.

From there she will push on through the many minefields to Fiume Harbour.

The ceasefire has been in force for several days, so the only lurking danger is from mines. The cruiser is trying to avoid them, but just after noon she strikes one, and is broken in two.

The *Cesare Rossarol* sinks so quickly after the impact that the crew have little chance of reaching safety. Winter water temperatures render survival almost impossible, and only a few men manage to save themselves.

The stern and bow sections end up 300m apart on the Adriatic seabed. The *Cesare Rossarol* is almost certainly one of the Italian Navy's biggest losses.

Since the summer of 2013, we have been playing around with the idea of doing something with the wreck of the *Cesare Rossarol*. The idea originated that August, during a pleasant exploration week organised by Maurizio Grbac of Krnica Dive in Croatia.

The wreck lies in relatively shallow water, between 45 and 50m, and because it is visited regularly from Krnica, it has been reasonably well protected against wreck-robbers. The same cannot be said about many of the shipwrecks on the Adriatic's west coast. *Baron Gautsch* is a good example, because so many of its features have disappeared over time.

For a wreck that has been at the bottom of the sea for nearly 100 years, the current state of the *Cesare Rossarol* is very good, and every once in a while another new section appears from the bottom of the ocean. Unfortunately the stern deck has slowly started collapsing over the past six years, so it seemed to be high time to start mapping all facets of the wreck.

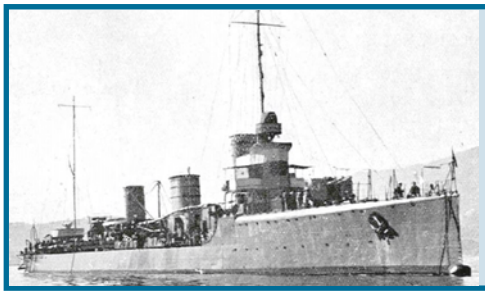
Above left: The divers' notes are transferred to a board on their return.

Above and inset: Gun barrel on the *Cesare Rossarol*.

It's easy enough to launch a project, but it can take months to turn it into reality. First we need a date. We decide on the holiday season, and pick a week when tidal effects will be minimal. The visibility is likely to be good, but you can't rule



ROSSAROL



The *Cesare Rossarol*

This light cruiser was built in 1913 by Gio Ansaldo & C of Genoa, which at the time was also building two sister-ships, Alessandro Poerio and Guglielmo Pepe, all three intended for the Italian Navy.

The names of the vessels came from fighters who helped to defend Venice during the Austro-Hungarian Revolution in 1848.

The three Poerio-class ships differed only in their weaponry:

LENGTH: 85m, Beam: 11.6m, Height: 8m
PROPULSION: 24,000hp steam engine
SPEED: 32 knots
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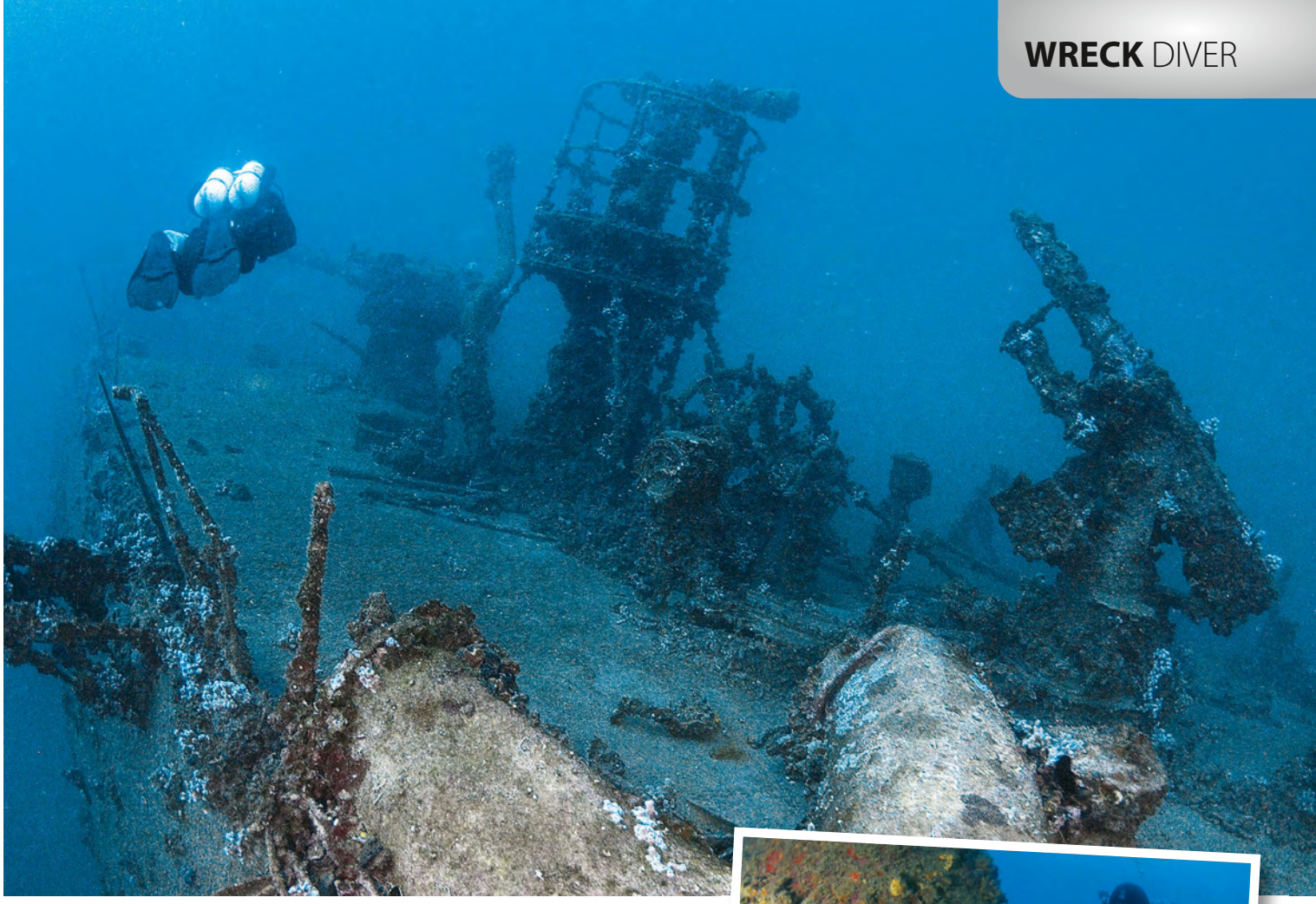
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out the possibility that it won't be.

The tricky part is to get the right group of motivated divers together. After announcing the project, we soon start receiving applications from around Europe, and settle on seven participants from the Netherlands, one from the Czech Republic and two from Norway.

All are certified GUE (Global Underwater Explorers) Tech 1 or Tech 2.

With the support of Krnica Dive and Maurizio's experience, the task of filling all the twin-sets and stages won't be a problem. He even put a dive-boat at our disposal!

The project is fully supported by GUE because it's in line with its education, conservation and exploration objectives, one of which is that the importance of the project should be communicated to the local population and authorities.

Our aim is to map the current state of the *Cesare Rossarol* to protect the wreck for the future, but this won't be easy. The mine caused considerable damage, scattering parts of the vessel over a large area.

Three sections require our attention: the stern, the most interesting part of the wreck field; the bow, which ended up with the deck and all of its features facing into the sand; and, finally, the major and minor components that ended up on the seabed in the 300m between bow and stern. That's quite a search area!

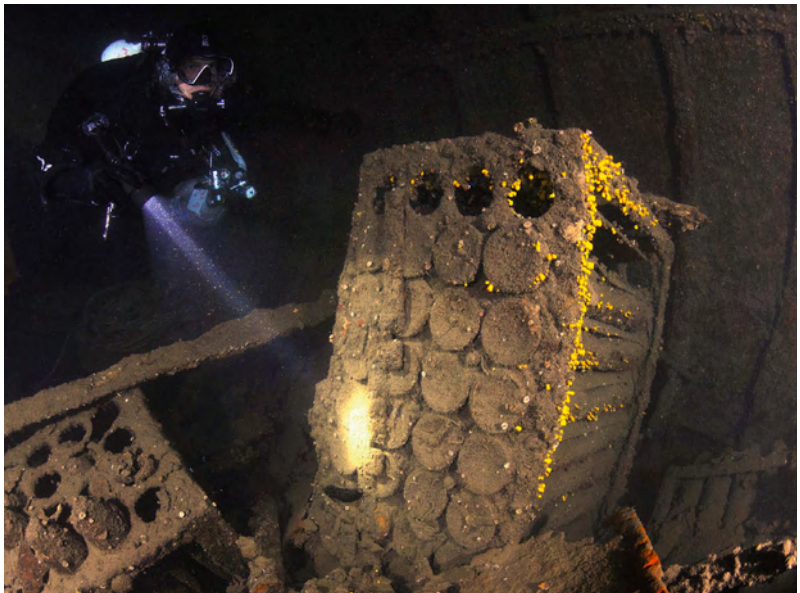
COMPREHENSIVE BRIEFINGS are regarded as vital if we are to have made progress by the end of the week. The dive-teams all have their own missions, and if these are not properly discussed and clear to everyone, good results will be difficult to achieve.



Top: The *Rossarol*'s stern is a veritable maritime museum.

Above: The bronze star on the bow remains an impressive sight.

Left: Ammunition and an abundance of grenades can be found in the cruiser's bow section.



At both bow and stern the objective is to obtain precise dimension and depth measurements, a detailed outline and compass directions.

In the debris field we hope to connect the forward-facing portions of the stern using a line, survey this line by determining distances and compass directions; and search for and identify specific wreck parts and note their relative position to the line.

In all three sections photo and video documentation has to be obtained.

By measuring bow and stern, we can determine the size of the middle section blown away by the force of the mine.

The number of dives is limited, as is time under water, so this must be used as efficiently as possible. The teams are reminded that no navigation lines can be tied to major wreck parts. The fishermen

who cover this area regularly could get their nets or lines entangled with them and consequently pull the wreck to pieces, or move important parts.

The Tech 1 teams focus on the stern, but the 30 minutes of bottom time allocated for each dive fly by. Even divers who have previously visited a section find that it always takes a while to get their bearings and swim to where they need to be to continue their work.

The Tech 2 teams, with a little more bottom time at 60 minutes, focus on the debris field.

When I first dived the *Cesare Rossarol*, the imposing gun at the stern, the striking wheel and the crow's nest had impressed me. But now I am curious about this field, as it hasn't been studied before.

I am part of a Tech 1 team, and although I'm diving with hitherto-unknown divers of various nationalities, the project runs without problems. When you're running under the GUE flag, all the divers use the same procedures and there is no miscommunication, making the process very efficient and pleasant.

Every day we get to know the area better, and discover more each time. We see a lot of ammunition, boxes, shell-cases, an anchor and, to our surprise, several torpedoes standing upright in the sand!



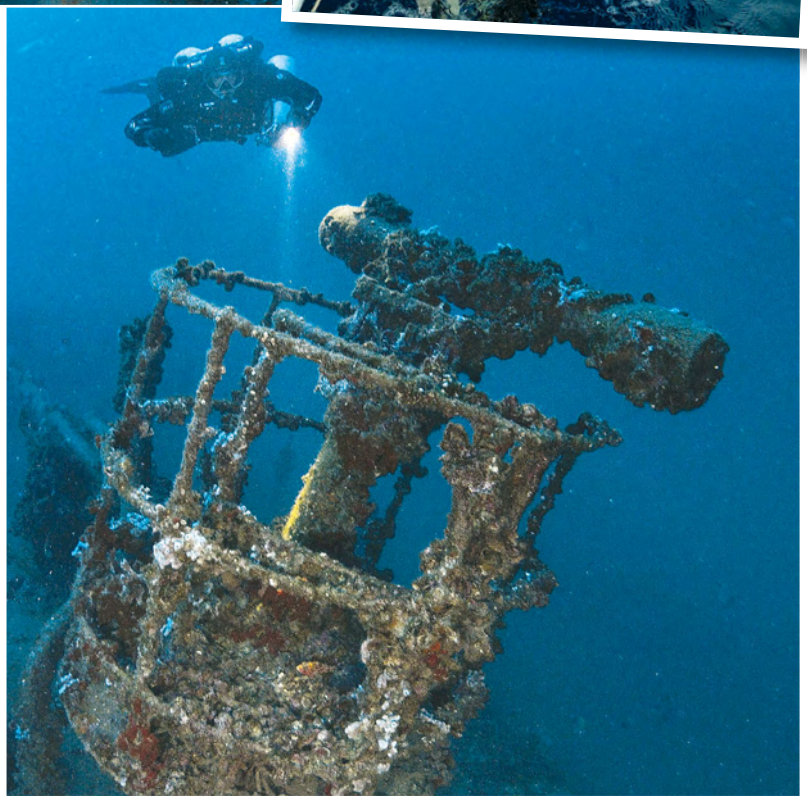


Above: The ship's telegraph stands tall.

Above right: Satisfied with the dive, but there is still a lot of work to do.

Right: The striking bronze range-finder is a notable feature.

Below: Team-members celebrate after a rewarding week's diving.



ON OUR FINAL DIVE we try to make that connection between stern and bow (*writes Peter Zaal*). I attach my reel to the stern and we start swimming further out towards the bow.

The vis is getting worse, with a milky layer floating above the bottom, and we find fewer and fewer wreck parts as we go.

We encounter a number of fishing-lines, and I tie my line to one and put a mark on it. We follow the fishing-line, but then reach our minimum gas limit and have to begin our ascent.

Slowly we get shallower and above the fog layer. I'm keeping track of my bottom-timer, and then I look ahead.



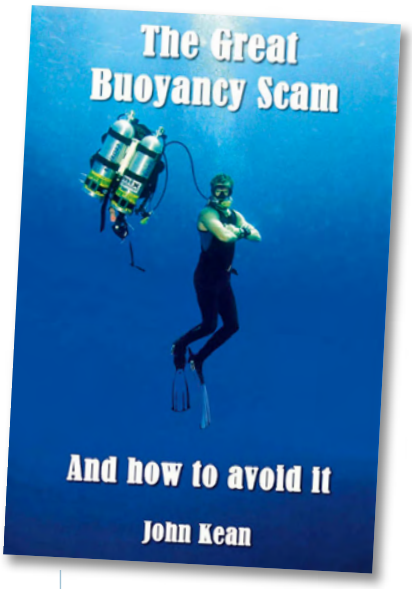
I can't believe what I'm seeing – it's the bow of the *Cesare Rossarol*!

It looks mighty impressive sticking out of the sand, 10m ahead of us. What a view! Making the connection from stern to bow feels like a great achievement.

I can see that my buddy is as excited as I am, but we must continue our ascent. We swim to the shot-line and continue up – it's a great climax to the week!

✹ *Krnica Dive specialises in technical diving and is located at the port of Krnica, 15 miles from Pula on Istria's east coast. It has four boats and offers wreck-diving courses and "exploration dives" to discover new wrecks, www.krnicadive.com*

Putting non-divers straight



The Great Buoyancy Scam – And How To Avoid It (eBook)
by John Kean

THERE WAS NEVER ANY DOUBT that this, John Kean's fourth diving-related book, would be well-written. His books are always well-written.

As I started reading the preface, however, I was taken aback as the author almost immediately "went off on one", delivering a searing indictment of the diving industry and how it sets up artificial barriers between the new diver and the individual instructor.

I'm sure a lot of instructors, especially those based at overseas resorts as Kean is in Sharm el Sheikh, would agree with his argument that whereas you might choose your golf pro on individual merit, in diving you take whoever you're given by the administrative go-betweens.

He develops this argument in a long chapter later on, in which he asserts that the rot set in some seven years ago. That's when big tour operators moved in to get their slice of the dive-centres' pie, he says, with the result that "quick" and "cheap" became the watchwords in entry-level training (adversely affecting instructors' income in the process).

"*Remember that large segments of the industry have been sidetracked for short-term commercial gain and the result has been the churning out of poorly trained divers who only think they have been taught properly*," he writes at one point. No sitting on the fence here!

DIVER TRAINING IS A SERVICE, not a product, and it should *not* be seen as something to get out of the way as fast as possible, Kean argues, because diving is risky only when corners are cut. Which is where the title *The Great Buoyancy Scam* comes in, with its implicit question: how often are new divers certified without fully mastering the basic skills?

None of which I would argue with, and Kean, with his 6000 dives and 1500 certified students, deserves to be heard. My problem is with whether divers-in-waiting really want to hear what to them will sound like ranting in the back-room as they walk nervously into the dive centre.

Because the idea of this book is to set out for non-divers what's involved in learning to dive, warts and all, squarely confronting the dangers and allaying their fears.

John Kean isn't one to sugarcoat the message: "*Lungs are like tea-bag linings and are very soft tissue areas. The water pressure at 30ft is twice the pressure at the surface and if a diver went all the way to the surface with a held breath then his lungs would be hanging out of his ears and eye-sockets by the time he got there*" is just one example.

He goes on to put the chances of this happening into clear perspective, but I think that cumulatively his rich mix may be more than some hopefuls will be ready for *before* they've actually committed to the sport.

I fear too that they might perceive the arguments about respect for instructors as special pleading.

There is a lot of technique detail here that I think non-divers will find difficult to absorb straight off the page. The chapter on neutral buoyancy, for example, is as clear a description of how that peculiar discipline should be mastered as you'll read anywhere, but imagine yourself reading about the finer points before you had even put on a BC!

I reckon this book is more likely to help newcomers to the sport once they have already taken the plunge and have a certain amount of knowledge, but feel there are still gaps to be filled. Like Simon Pridmore's recent *Scuba Confidential*, it's full of invaluable advice on best practice in the fundamental areas.

"*I say, Mary, would you care to join me in a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus activity?*'

"*That sounds scary, Henry, I think I'd sooner shove my head in a microwave oven but thanks for asking*." Henry and Mary crop up in *The Great Buoyancy Scam* at regular intervals as light relief, and made me laugh.

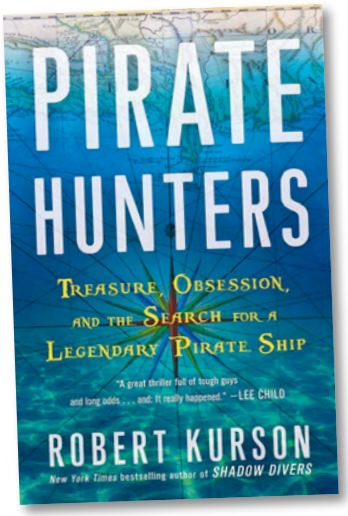
Clever book – I just hope that all those who stand to benefit actually get to read it through.

Steve Weinman

John Kean
Kindle edition
eBook, 200pp, £3.99

THE MINDSET OF A BUCCANEER

Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship
by Robert Kurson



A FEW DAYS BEFORE John Chatterton and John Mattera were due to embark on a long-planned quest to find the treasure ship *San Bartolome* off the Scilly Isles, a call came through from legendary treasure-hunter Tracy Bowden.

He needed to see them, and the upshot of their meeting was to put that quest on hold.

Most of us will have seen *Pirates of the Caribbean* and been suitably entertained, but were real-life pirates of that era really as cunning and devious as the colourful Captain Jack Sparrow? Chatterton and Mattera were about to find out…

Their new search was for the *Golden Fleece*, a ship captained by the infamous 17th-century pirate Joseph Bannister and lost in the northern Caribbean.

This wonderful book about their venture reads like a novel but is entirely based on an amazing journey to get into the mind of a pirate.

The search is a gamble with a great deal at risk for both men. They and their dive-team travel in search of clues as to the whereabouts of the *Golden Fleece* and battle everything from dangerous rivals to governmental red tape, facing in the process a serious test of their friendship.

It's 10 years since Robert Kurson published a diver favourite, *Shadow Divers*, also featuring the adventures of US wreck-diver John Chatterton (with Richie Kohler), diving deep off New Jersey in search of a WW2 U-boat.

And once again in *Pirate Hunters* Kurson gives his factual tale a real thriller edge. The book gallops along at a blistering pace, shifting us deftly between the 17th century and the present day.

The team soon realise that modern technology alone won't cut it. The only way to find a pirate ship is to think like a pirate, but with little known about Bannister himself the divers are at times reduced to abandoning their endless research and trusting to trial and error and sheer blind luck.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and believe it will appeal to anyone, diver and non-divers alike.

It gives the reader a genuine feeling of being out there with the team, sharing their anguish, frustration, need for patience and every twist and turn of their adventure – everything that makes for a terrific read.

I wonder if someone will make a film of the book one day…



Alex Khachadourian
Random House USA
ISBN: 9781400063369
Softback, 336pp, £18.49



CONTENT MADE FOR DIGITAL

Diving Almanac & Book of Records
edited by Jeffrey J Gallant

SEVEN OR EIGHT YEARS AGO, DIVER would be sent copies of a softback book called the *Diving Almanac & Book of Records*. It was packed with scuba reference material but, perhaps because of its transatlantic origin, perhaps because we would always look for the very latest data on the Internet rather than in a book, we rarely used it as a reference source.

Eventually it stopped coming and, to be honest, we had hardly registered its absence.

Apparently it's five years since the last print copy of the *Diving Almanac* appeared, but now it's back as a digital edition and, what's more, it's free.

The book, downloadable as a PDF, is updated monthly and is wholly funded by advertising. It contains nearly 300 pages of diving and underwater world data "that you will not find anywhere else".

Included in the first of the new-format books are 542 interesting diving records and "aquatic superlatives", a "Who's Who" of 618 divers from around the world, and a comprehensive timeline of diving history and underwater exploration.

Dipping into the records section at random on your behalf, I emerged with the information that whereas the most fertile marine fish is an ocean sunfish, estimated to have some 300 million eggs in a single ovary, the least fertile, a *mpulungu*, produces seven eggs max. Seems unfair.

The most bubble rings produced from one breath of air issued from the lips of one Doug "Shaka" Corbin in 1989. In 2011 Zdenec Bradac juggled three balls for 90 minutes under water. You can dine out on this stuff, and there's shedloads of it.

I pointed out a couple of small errors in the book as they were related to this magazine, and the nice thing is that editor Jeffrey Gallant recognises that information may be incorrect and welcomes reader input. So if you want to pick holes, be his guest!

Gallant, a French Canadian who has been diving for 34 years, is a Greenland-shark research scientist.

The digital format of the book will suit his content better than paper, as he can now make any alterations or additions quickly and cheaply.

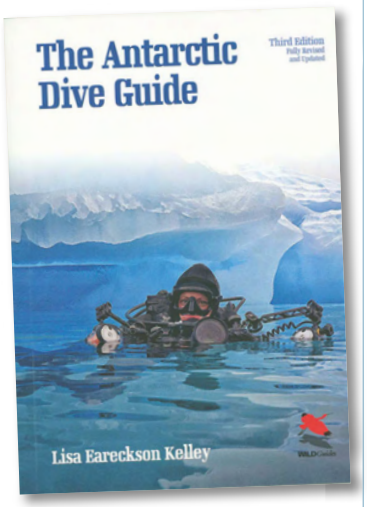
You can download the latest edition from the website below. As it's free, you have nothing to lose but time!

Steve Weinman

Porbeagle Press
www.divingalmanac.com
PDF, 290pp, free

COLD COMFORT

The Antarctic Dive Guide
by Lisa Eareckson Kelley



ONLY SO MANY DIVERS will count themselves as takers for a guide to diving Antarctic seas.

The number of tourists visiting the most remote part of the world may have soared over the years, but that still means no more than 35,000 a year, of which only a small proportion wish to experience the caress of -1.8° to 1°C waters at first hand. This book is therefore targeted at a self-selecting elite readership.

Apart from the challenges of the diving itself, which Lisa Eareckson Kelley describes unflinchingly at the outset, she warns that you can expect to pay between US $8000 and $25,000 for an Antarctic voyage – and that's without the substantial air fares to the tip of South America for embarkation, specialised dive gear, insurance and the diving itself!

The requirements for divers in terms of experience, training, fitness and equipment are naturally stringent.

You may be doing only one half-hour dive a day to a maximum of 18m, but no chances can be taken because there are no hyperbaric chambers in these parts.

And be aware that the challenges include, to take but one example, being unable to feel your lips, which means that divers regularly bite through their mouthpieces and sometimes start grinding down their teeth. Still fancy it?

If you do, this is the third edition of a WildGuides book that over nine years or so seems to have become a bible for Antarctic divers.

Anyone contemplating a dive trip there would be ill-advised to ignore it, especially when it comes to pre-visit preparations.

Four new dive sites bring the total covered to 31, and the other 27 have been updated along with the introductory features by the author and specialist guest writers, including new chapters on sea leopards and marine organisms.

The dive sites are mainly around the Antarctic Peninsula, the northernmost promontory of the seventh continent, plus South Georgia.

Lisa Eareckson Kelley is an American described as "probably the first person to learn to dive in the Antarctic" and spends half her time in polar regions.

Her book is impeccably written and well-produced and thought out, and the site guides are accompanied by clear maps and factfiles.

While I wouldn't go so far as to describe the photographs as "stunning", as the PR blurb does, they are generally sharp reference shots, with lots of starfish and anemones in evidence.

The additional features, particularly those by Goran Ehlme about leopard seals and underwater photography in Antarctic conditions, are particularly interesting.

I enjoyed reading this book much as I might one about space exploration, though I'm no more likely to do that than dive the frigid waters of the Southern Ocean.

For those saving for their trip of a lifetime, however, this has to be step 1.

Steve Weinman

Princeton University Press
ISBN: 9780691163444
Softback, 144pp, US $29.95

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (16 February, 2015)

1. **Amazing Diving Stories: Incredible Tales from Deep Beneath the Sea,** by John Bantin
2. **Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die,** by Chris Santella
3. **To Unplumbed Depths,** by Hans Hass
4. **Diver Down: Real-World Scuba Accidents and How to Avoid Them,** by Michael Ange
5. **The Silent World,** by Jacques Cousteau
6. **Diver Down: Real-World Scuba Accidents and How to Avoid Them (Kindle),** by Michael Ange
7. **The Dive Sites of Mauritius,** by Alan Mountain
8. **Reef Fish Identification: Tropical Pacific,** by Gerald Allen, Roger Steene & Paul Humann
9. **The Darkness Below,** by Rod Macdonald
10. **The Darkness Below (Kindle),** by Rod Macdonald

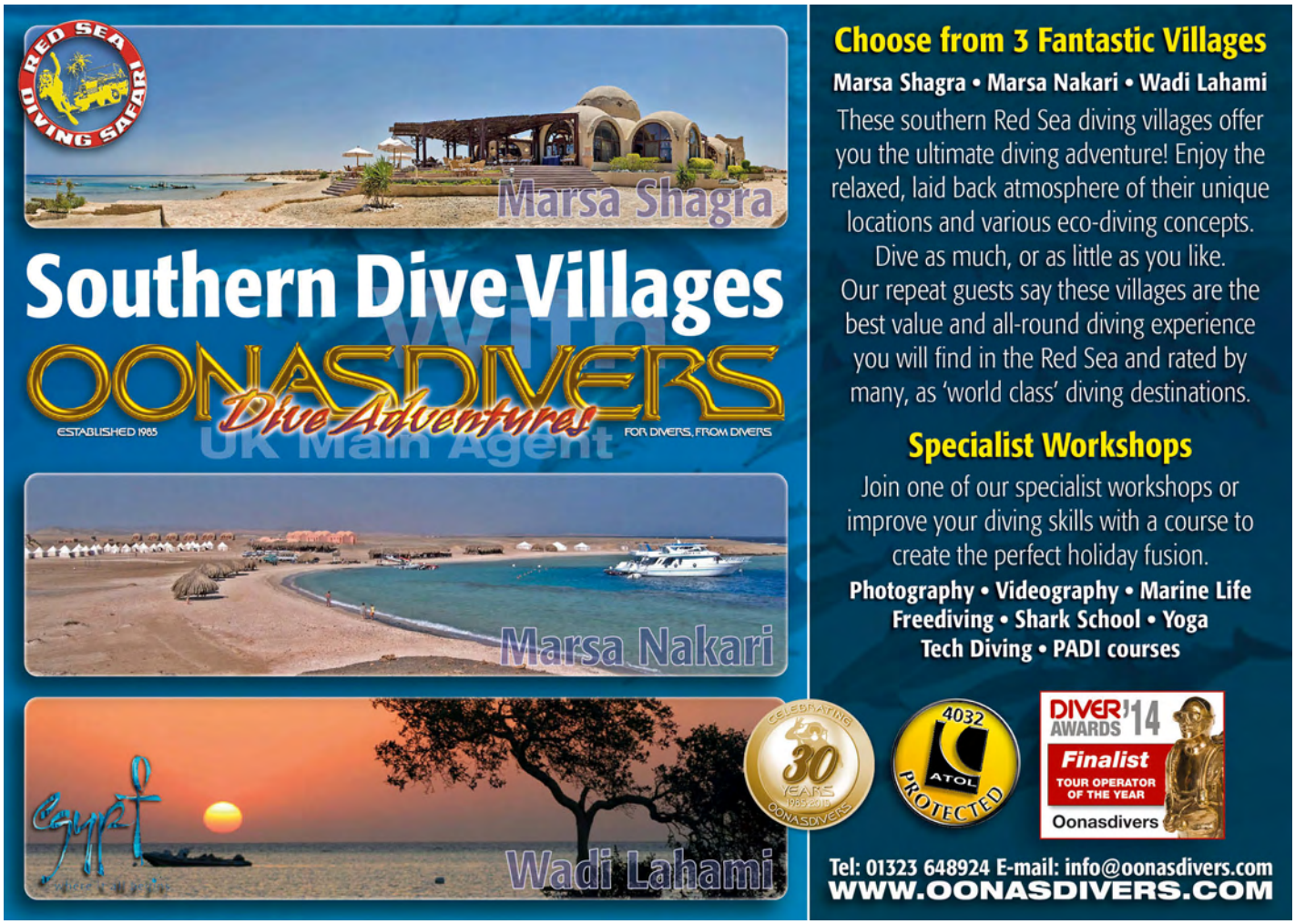
TOP 10 MOST WISHED-FOR DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (16 February, 2015)

1. **Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die,** by Chris Santella
2. **Dorset Dives, a Guide to Scuba-Diving Along the Jurassic Coast,** by Will Appleyard
3. **Sharm El Sheikh Diving Guide & Integrated Logbook,** by Rik Vercoe
4. **The Professional Diver's Handbook,** by John Bevan
5. **Neutral Buoyancy, Adventures in a Liquid World,** by Tim Ecott
6. **Reef Fish Identification: Caribbean, Bahamas, South Florida,** by Paul Humann & Ned DeLoach
7. **Manual of Freediving,** by Umberto Pelizzari & Stefano Tovaglieri
8. **Raising The Dead: A True Story of Death and Survival,** by Philip Finch
9. **The Silent World,** by Jacques Cousteau
10. **Dive Red Sea: The Ultimate Guide,** by Simon Rogerson


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Great British Wildlife Spectacles



In 2014 Monty Halls, Andy Torbet, Fourth Element and Suunto launched five Great British Diving Expeditions to access remote dives in the British Isles. If you wished you had been there, now may be your chance to join one of the five 2015 expeditions, this year going under the title Great British Wildlife Spectacles.

Led by wildlife photographers, videographers and marine biologists, these 4/5-day expeditions will be "diving with a purpose" adventures involving camping, exploring and usually a couple of RIB or shore dives a day.

They take place between May and September, and likely projects include the seals of the Scilly Isles, the conger eels of Connemara, the gannets of Bass Rock, the Monarch Islands and Cape Wrath (*above*), with prices ranging from £695 to £895.

The fee covers dives, air-fills, base-camp accommodation and provisions, marine survey taster sessions, photo guidance and a gift-pack. You bring your own dive and camping gear and pay to get to the venue.

If you fancy expeditionary diving without having to travel abroad, this might be for you.

▸▸ www.greatescapesdartmouth.co.uk

NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS



At the time of writing there are spaces available for two nine-day BigAnimals Expeditions to dive and snorkel with orcas off Lofoten Island, Norway.

Amos Nachoum is the wildlife adventure guide aboard the 30m ms *Sula* from 13 November, and another big-animal photographer, Amanda Cotton, leads the expedition from 9 January, 2016.

The price of each trip is US $10,800pp (two sharing a cabin) and you will spend six days cruising the fjords in the cold, clear Norwegian winter in search of orca pods, in spectacular surroundings and with a good chance of seeing the Northern Lights at night.

▸▸ biganimals.com

WATCH OUT FOR CANO

The Aggressor/Dancer fleets have come up with a new destination – Caño Island off Costa Rica's Pacific coast. They are offering seven-night trips aboard the *Wind Dancer* or *Okeanos Aggressor* liveaboards to this marine reserve off the country's Osa Peninsula.

The island is described as one of the most "beautiful jewels" in the Costa Rican national park system and home to "beautiful colourful corals, tropical fish, large pelagics, many varieties of sharks: hammerhead, nurse, whitetip..."

Guests are also advised that they could encounter amberjack, wahoo, rays, turtles and more, which all sounds like a diver's idea of a good day out.

A half-day's hiking in the Corcovado National Park is included in the trip.

Places are available from 25 March 2016 for US $2595pp. Is Caño set to be a new sensation?

▸▸ www.aggressor.com

Red Sea combo



Tour operator Diverse Travel is offering tailor-made Red Sea packages to Marsa Alam and the diving deeper south in Hamata. Available on 6, 13 and 20 May, its seven-night holidays include stays at the 4* Sands Port Ghalib from £759pp or the 5* Palace Port Ghalib from £789, both resorts on an all-inclusive, twin-share basis.

You get direct return flights between Gatwick and Marsa Alam, transfers and taxes and five days' boat diving with Emperor Divers, including the chance to dive Abu Dabab and Elphinstone.

For variety Marsa Alam can be combined with a resort stay in Hamata for a chance to dive Fury Shoal, the *Hamada* wreck and the Emperor Divers house reef.

▸▸ www.diverse travel.co.uk

Time out to search

Pharaoh Dive Clubs Red Sea is organising a Suez Wreck Hunt from 28 May, sailing from Hurghada on the liveaboard *Sea King Marco* with high hopes of locating the wrecks of the *Domiat* and *Shillong*.

Peter Collings leads what is intended to be based on a regular "Three Wars" itinerary of up to 16 Red Sea and Gulf of Suez wrecks ranging as far north as the *Turkia*, with two half-days dedicated to searching likely locations for these Suez wrecks.

The price is £695pp (two sharing), which covers seven days' "soft" all-inclusive accommodation, six days' diving and transfers.

▸▸ www.pharaoh diveclub.com

Camera-women head to head in Indonesia

Photo-journalist and instructor Jane Morgan is the star of Dive Worldwide's new 10-day September dive "week" at the Scuba Seraya Resort on the north-east coast of Bali in Indonesia.

The resort gives ready access to everything from the macro life on famed house reef Seraya Secrets to the iconic wreck of the USS *Liberty* in Tulamben. The trip includes unlimited shore diving, six boat dives around Tulamben and three dives on a day-trip to Nusa Lembongan and Penida, known in September for encounters with the elusive oceanic sunfish.

Jane Morgan's photo workshops are aimed mainly at newer underwater photographers.

The trip begins on 4 September, and costs from £1975pp, including return flights, transfers, seven nights' full board (two sharing), workshop and all diving.

www.diveworldwide.com



JANE MORGAN

Further north in Indonesia, meanwhile, photo-instructor Lisa Collins has teamed up with Sportif Dive Holidays to offer a one-week INON Underwater Photography Workshop at the Tasik Ria Dive Resort in Manado, North Sulawesi.



LISA COLLINS

Her course is aimed at snappers from beginner to intermediate level, and practicals take place at Bunaken Marine Park as well as offshore reef sites, so take in everything from renowned wall dives to critter locations.

The 10-day Sportif package starts four days after the Bali venture on 8 September and costs from £1995, including full-board accommodation, return flights (30kg baggage allowance), transfers, workshop and up to 17 dives, with additional early morning and night dives available.



Also bear in mind that Tasik Ria now has its own resident photo pro from the UK in the shape of Gill Macdonald, so either way you won't go short on advice at this popular resort.

www.sportifdive.co.uk

Offer you can't refuse?



We associate the name with the *Godfather* movies, but have you come across Francis Ford Coppola's Turtle Inn at Placencia on the Caribbean coast of Belize? It offers a seven-night whale shark package during full-moon cycles from 3 May to 2 June, so both divers and snorkellers have a chance of encounters from its 14m dive-boat *Miss Ellie*.

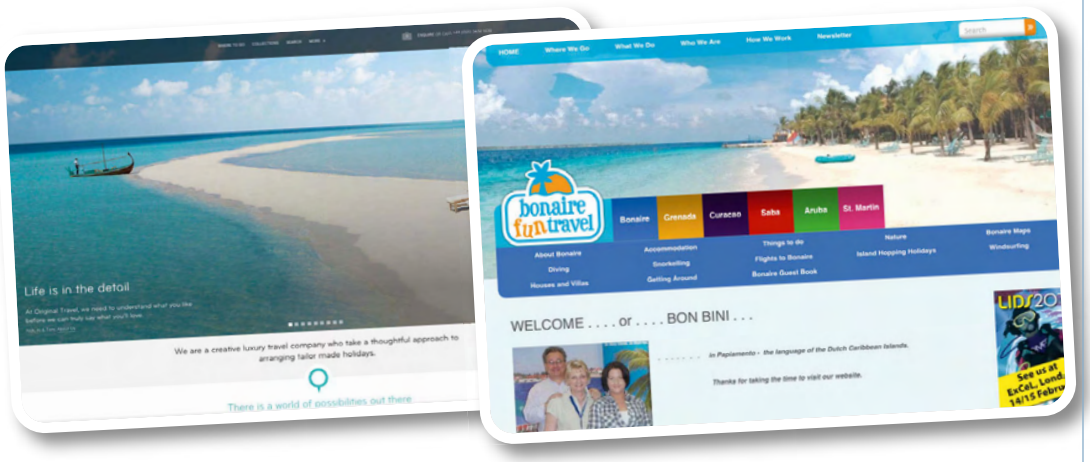
You stay in a seaview cottage at the 25-room "hideaway" resort, overlooking Placencia Lagoon, with views of the Maya Mountains and Victoria Peak and access to the Belize Barrier Reef, the second longest in the world.

Turtle Inn conducts the dives at Gladden Spit two days before the full moon dates and up to 10 days afterwards, and six other reef dives are included at marine reserve sites.

The whale shark package includes half-board accommodation, picnic lunches, three two-tank dives, two whale shark dives and airport transfers and costs from £1900pp.

www.coppolaresorts.com

Websites for Original and Caribbean Fun Travel



Tailor-made tour operator Original Diving has launched a new website. It says it has improved its existing popular "Marine Life Finder" and "When To Go Where" sections and added new features too.

These include the ability to save favourite trip ideas as you browse, and to find solutions if you have some special requirement such as locations suitable for snorkelling. A programme to integrate destination videos is also now underway.

www.originaldiving.com

Meanwhile another UK-based holiday specialist Caribbean Fun Travel has launched a new website in what it says is response to a huge increase in holiday bookings to its group of six southern Caribbean destinations – Bonaire, Grenada, Curaçao, Aruba, St Martin and Saba.

CFT says that the new site includes a "huge range" of accommodation and plentiful information for divers and snorkellers, including interactive dive-site maps with detailed information for each island.

www.caribbeanfuntravel.co.uk

WELL AND TRULY TESTED



NIGEL WADE enjoys himself this month with a well-favoured BC, fins that could spare him from needing to cross-dress, an unusual approach to bags and warmwater gloves

BC

APD COMMANDO ESCAPE SUB THREE ZERO





THE VAST MAJORITY OF BUOYANCY compensators I have tested over the past 18 months have been wing styles, so it's time to redress the balance by putting a traditional jacket-style BC through its paces.

Modelled on the "bullet-proof" Buddy Commando, it's the latest version of Ambient Pressure Diving's Commando Escape Sub Three Zero.

Disclaimer

I need to make it clear from the start that I'm a huge fan of Buddy BCs. I own an original Buddy Commando that has been with me on thousands of dives, and although it looks beaten to death it's still going strong.

I first encountered a prototype called the Buddy Escape on a group test more than four years ago, and took it for a short spin in a swimming pool. I fell in love with it and subsequently bought one.

Unfortunately, my personal dive gear was stolen while on a recent trip to the Caribbean, including the Escape. It's testament to this love affair that I immediately replaced it with the latest version.

The Design

The Commando Escape is lightweight at under 3kg, and APD says it was born in response to customer demand for a high-quality travel jacket.

It's constructed using a bespoke 800-denier fabric commissioned by APD and called OceanSeal 800. High-frequency welded and double-stitched, it provides an extremely robust yet lightweight product.

The Escape has a single bladder with cleverly positioned air-cell studs to improve the airflow and ensure that there is no problem with trapped air when it comes to ascending.

It also features four huge pockets. Two are capacious enough to take reels, DSMBs, spare masks, large torches and camera accessories, while the smaller ones are more suited to slates, thumb-spools and back-up lights.

They all have zips that open from the front, small D-rings for securing the contents and grommets for knife attachment.

The low-profile power inflator is secured to the shoulder harness with a quick-release polycarbonate clip.

This features an elbow dump at the rear, where it connects to the jacket.

Two more dumps positioned at the top right



The front D-ring is used for gauge attachment.



The large front-entry zipped pocket.



APD embroidered livery on the right shoulder.

and lower left are activated by pull-cords. Cleverly the large knob attached to the shoulder-cord is negatively buoyant, while the one on the kidney dump is positive, enabling them to be found quickly.

The cylinder is attached using APD's own Super Grip cam-band system, holding it securely with the aid of a rubber pad to prevent slippage.

There is also a cylinder-mounting strap at the top to keep the jacket close to the wearer's body. Twin tanks can be configured using accessory cam-bands and spacer blocks.

The BC's rigid backplate is made from lightweight plastic with a padded mesh cover for comfort, and has a useful carry-handle.

Another clever feature is the telescoping, elasticated cummerbund, which provides a constant snug fit as pressure-changes alter the diver's profile.

A double adjustable-webbing waistband with a large trident clip and adjustable shoulder-straps with trident break-points keep everything secure.

A sternum-strap is fitted at a height that doesn't interfere with a drysuit inflator and keeps the bladder at the hips and waist from gaping.

The BC has four strategically positioned, large aluminium and four plastic D-rings. It is finished in black with hi-vis yellow panels and reflective silver piping, with tasteful embroidered livery.

Maximum lift varies with the size of the BC. The one featured is size L and offers 19.3kg of buoyancy, weighing in at 2.87kg.

SPECS

PRICE ›› **£270**
SIZES ›› **S, M, L, XL, XXL**
LIFT CAPACITY ›› **S 11.2kg, M 17.3kg, L 19.3kg, XL 21.4kg, XXL 27.5kg**
DRY WEIGHT ›› **S 2.63kg, M 2.78kg, L 2.87kg, XL 2.99kg, XXL 3.26kg**
D-RINGS ›› **4 aluminium, 4 plastic**
POCKETS ›› **4 zipped**
CONTACT ›› **www.apdiving.com**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆

In Use

Everything about the Commando Escape seems to suit my style of diving. The jacket configuration holds me on the surface with no tendency to shove my face forward, which makes it ideal for surface split-level-type photography when my feet are floating.

The lack of an integrated weight system means that trim can be fine-tuned quickly simply by repositioning weights on a belt.

The elasticated cummerbund stays snug and prevents the jacket riding up as it auto-adjusts for suit squeeze on descent.

Inflation or deflation is made very easy by the ergonomic design of the power inflator and the perfect positioning of the dump-valves.

Air migrates easily around the air-cell, always finding the highest point without the hint of a trapped bubble. The large pockets are easy to access, and hold a surprising amount of gear.

The D-rings are positioned perfectly. My preference is to clip the gauge and alternative regulator to the two large aluminium rings at the front of the pockets, streamlining the hoses and making the instruments easily accessible.

I have regularly dived in Egypt with the Escape and a twin-cylinder configuration; the massive amount of lift offered by this BC makes this a safe exercise, especially at the surface.

In the comfort department, this BC has few equals. It doesn't squeeze when it's fully inflated and it's padded in all the right places without being puffy. For easy transportation, it packs away into a compact package with the help of the sternum-strap and an extra external clip.

Conclusion

It's a Buddy (renamed a Commando), what's not to like about it? The Commando Escape is a tough, comfortable and above all lightweight BC that does its job without drama or fuss.

At first glance it may look basic, but take a closer look and you'll find that it has features that subtly conspire to make the diving experience enjoyable and safe.

There is only one problem – the colour. Most people I've bored with the finer attributes of this magnificent product have stopped the conversation dead by asking: "Does it come in all-black?"

I wonder if those Cornish pixies have a sombre-hued version in the pipeline? ■

LUGGAGE

MARES CRUISE SYSTEM

I'VE NEVER BEEN A BIG FAN OF DIVE LUGGAGE that incorporates a frame and wheels, because the extra weight of the bags is always a hindrance at airport check-ins. Or it was, until a recent trip to the Caribbean saw me transit through Barbados airport.

The planners at Barbados seem to have spotted an opportunity to provide an income for locals who work as porters, and charge ridiculous amounts of cash to move heavy bags from A to B.

There are no baggage trollies to be found, so I had no choice but to pay these extortionists $10 to move my heavy holdalls from the baggage reclaim in Arrivals to the transit desk 200m away.

Wheeled luggage is now my new-found friend. Italian gear giant Mares has a new wheeled bag system that offers a lot more than standard dive luggage – I know, because I've been giving it a go.

There are three hangers inside the grey interior of the Mares Cruise System bag, with deployment guide and gear checklist.





The Design

The Cruise System bag is constructed from 600-denier polyester with a twin PU coating, and has a black outer skin and a light-grey interior lining. Inside there are two straps for securing the contents, and elasticated mesh pockets on the flanks to help organise essential bits and bobs.

All the zippers are YKK high-quality nylon with large finger loops.

External compression straps are provided to reduce the profile when the bag is partially filled, or to take unwanted pressure off the zippers when it's filled to the gunwales.

Mesh panels in the sides of the bag allow for ventilation to assist in drying the contents even when it is sealed.



Cruise System mesh shoulder-bag.

An internal frame incorporating a telescoping handle that links with the hard plastic base and wheels, along with two rails at the rear, provides rigidity and strength.

Handles at the head and base of the bag plus two at the front and one at the side give various carrying options.

The bag offers an internal capacity of 122 litres from its 51 x 31 x 79cm dimensions and weighs, it must be said, a not-inconsiderable 5.9kg. It's finished with subtle embroidered livery that doesn't scream "dive-bag" and honeycombed nylon panels with reflective piped edges.

The System

And now for something completely different, because a full set of dive gear can be hung, hosed off and left to dry – while still in the bag.

The Cruise System has three multi-purpose hangers complete with stainless-steel hooks and clip buckles.

The hangers are cleverly designed to take various dive-gear components including suits, BCs, regulators, boots, hoods, masks and fins. These can be hung externally using the hooks, or inside the bag using the buckles.

When the kit is hung inside the bag it can be extended through a zipped opening so that suits are at full-length and aren't scrunched up.

A drop-down mesh bag extends below the opening to keep everything in place and will catch any items that fall off the hangers; it also has a drain plug in the bottom.

The mesh bag is detachable via a zip and has a drawstring opening and shoulder-strap, making it ideal for separate use as a boat-bag.

In Use

I used the System bag to transport my gear to various inland dive-sites in the UK, and have to confess to not having taken it on any overseas trips, because the time period for the tests coincided with an early-year drought of sunny destination assignments.

However for the purposes of this test I put the bag through some rigorous use. It devoured my UK dive gear and its capacious dimensions took everything I could throw at it, including a dry-bag with spare clothes, underwater camera components, lights and spares.

The best bit was when I got home and deployed the hangers and drop-down mesh bag. I suspended the main bag by its external stainless hook in the garden, opened all the flaps, pulled the mesh bag down and washed the whole lot with a garden hose.

It was dry within a few hours, and all I had to do was tuck the gear back inside the bag, secure the zips and store it in my workshop ready for the next trip.

The roller system employs a wide wheelbase that provided a stable platform. It was smooth to pull or push on flat surfaces, and the strategically placed handles made it easy to lift in and out of the car too.

One stroke of genius is the light grey lining, which made finding items that normally vanish into the black void of other bags an easy task. It's a minor feature, but I wish all makers of dive-bags would consider it.



Washed gear hung up to dry.

Conclusion

Wheeled luggage is definitely heavier than standard bags, I started this review by stating that I wasn't a fan until I was stuck at Arrivals with my heavy duffels and had to pay a mugger to move them.

This Mares Cruise System would have been most welcome in this scenario, as it would have been at most American airports when faced with paying non-refundable $5 fees for a trolley.

I would definitely sacrifice some non-essential kit against the weight gain of this bag rather than dip into my precious beer money – how fickle am I?

Mares has put a lot of thought into the design of this bag, and the result is a system that can be deployed at will, or used solely to transport dive gear.

Attention to detail is second to none. There are robust reinforcing strips at the wear-points, and even a dive-kit checklist and deployment guide printed in the main compartment cover.

The lighter-coloured interior isn't unique in the baggage world, but it is a rarity and a welcome addition to what is a well-built, feature-rich, top-end dive-bag.

A 6kg bag is not for everyone, though to cut back on the weight the hangers and mesh bag can be left at home.

I'm sure I could live without them on overseas trips, especially when faced by those smiling assassins at the airport check-in. ■

SPECS

PRICE ›› **£202**
COLOUR ›› **Black with grey interior**
VOLUME ›› **122 litres**
DIMENSIONS ›› **51 x 31 x 79cm**
WEIGHT ›› **5.9kg**
EXTERNAL POCKETS ›› **One small zipped pouch**
CARRY HANDLES ›› **Five**
COMPRESSION STRAPS ›› **Two**
VENTILATION ›› **Two mesh panels**
EXTRAS ›› **Three gear hangers. Drawstring mesh bag with shoulder-strap**
CONTACT ›› **www.mares.com**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆

FINS
AQUA LUNG X SHOT



LAST YEAR I CONDUCTED A GROUP TEST of fins (*Kicking Back The Power,* June), and requested fins that generated the most power from various makers' line-ups.

My favourites turned out to be a pair designed specifically for women.

I know what you're thinking, but they performed brilliantly. Although they didn't generate the most power, they ticked the boxes in all the other departments.

In the review I wrote: "*These may be gender-specific fins, but they were so good I'm thinking of cross-dressing.*"

The fins were the Shot FX models from Aqua Lung's women's range. The company also make a male version, and this is called the X Shot.

The Design

Aqua Lung says that X Shot fins have evolved from the technology used in its earlier Slingshot and Hotshot models.

The maker uses the term "Power Transmission Zone" to describe the fin's blade-to-foot-pocket connection. This has a V-shaped rubberised section that stretches at the mid-fin pivot point just in front of the wearer's toes to help snap the blade back in place between fin-strokes.

The blades are built with a high-flex centre panel set into the stiffer high-performance elastomer blade.

This creates a spoon effect when finning, allowing for more water movement, and ergonomic side-rails are meant to prevent the water spilling over the edge, to aid stability.

The foot-pocket has a rigid foot-bed with a non-slip moulding on the inside and a flexible rubberised dorsal. There are also rubberised non-slip sections on the underside.

The fins are finished with Aqua Lung's own stainless-steel spring-straps fitted with flexible heel pads. X Shots are available in a choice of three colours and four sizes.

In the water

I took the X Shot fins to both the Maldives and Egypt to try them out. The blade was medium-sized and the spacious foot-pocket proved a good fit with 5mm neoprene boots – it was also long enough to encompass almost the whole of my foot, leaving very little heel exposed.

The spring-straps were very easy to get on and off with the aid of the large pull-loop on the heel-pad, and they held my feet securely without any uncomfortable pressure on my Achilles.

The X Shot's performance was tested to the max when we encountered fast currents in the Maldivian atolls as tidal movement squeezed the sea through channels between islands and sunken reefs.

They came through the challenge without collapsing at the mid-point of the blade, proving that they were stiff enough for these conditions.

I did suffer a bit of muscle-burn in the process, although to be honest my own model of fin would probably have produced much the same outcome.

I found that the X Shots provided a bit of snap in acceleration and responded well to quick changes in finning speed or style. They felt extremely stable, and didn't produce any twisting or wobbling when pushed hard.

In Egypt on a wreck safari the length of the blade proved to be perfect for my style of diving when penetrating tight wreck interiors. Some of my fellow wreck-heads prefer shorter blades for this purpose but then have to compromise in the power department.

SPECS

PRICE ›› **£82**
SIZES ›› **S, R, L, XL**
BLADE LENGTH ›› **62cm (size Regular)**
BUOYANCY ›› **Negative**
COLOUR ›› **Blue, orange, black**
STRAPS ›› **Stainless-steel spring with soft heel-pad.**
CONTACT ›› **www.aqualung.com/uk**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆

I found these fins easy to frog-kick with too, pushing water behind instead of beneath me to ensure that I didn't destroy the vis by kicking up clouds of soft silt.

I took them to our outdoor pool in January to test their pulling power against a set of digital scales.

The water was bitterly cold, so I wore a drysuit and Rockboot combination and found that the foot-pocket was a little tight, but not uncomfortably so.

The X Shots produced very similar results to the women's Shot FX version from the group test, pulling the scales round to just under 22kg.

Conclusion

I've been using Plana Avanti Quattros as my fin of choice for many years and I'm sure that in time my muscles have been honed to deal with the extra kicking force needed to get the best from them.

The X Shot fins behaved in a very similar way to the Quattros and I needed that muscle power at times, especially when faced with strong currents with my bulky camera rig.

The fins came through everything the ocean could throw at them – with flying colours.

The Shot FX and its male counterpart differ only in the design of the foot-pocket and the colour combinations.

I like these fins, and I'm relieved that I no longer need to contemplate cross-dressing to dive with them. ■

GLOVES
MACWET **MICROMESH / CLIMATEC**

IF YOU DON'T NEED GLOVES FOR THERMAL protection, why do you need them at all? That's the school of thought rightly adopted by divers and guides visiting or plying their trade around the world's fragile warmwater reef environments.

The thinking is that if divers are wearing gloves they're more likely to touch or even grab hold of corals and other fragile structures, causing long-term damage.

However, divers need protection too. Water-softened skin can be easily cut by the very gear we use, and for all those of us prepared to dive in a responsible manner, I think warmwater gloves could have a place in our kit bags. UK-based MacWet has a range of lightweight gloves that seem suitable for such a task.



MacWet Climatec long-cuff glove in blue.

The Design

Designed for outside sports in general, MacWet gloves feature a fabric called Aquatec that the maker says responds to moisture and climatic change. It is used for the palms and fingers, with a polyamide, polyurethane and elastane mix for the backing. An elasticated cuff with a Velcro fastening is standard throughout the range.

The gloves are available in two ranges, Micromesh and Climatec, with either long or short cuffs in 14 sizes and six colours.

In Use

I was supplied with two pairs of gloves to try out in real-world diving scenarios. The first thing I noticed was the fit and, cliché though it might be, they really did fit like a glove.

They offered little to no thermal protection, but the palms and fingers were protected no matter what task I was performing.

The Aquatec material was, as the maker claimed, "all grip and no slip", even when used topside after an hour's immersion.

There was no loss of dexterity with the thin material covering my hands like a second skin. This was evident when undertaking fiddly tasks such as mask-strap adjustment, or changing the settings on my camera and adjusting the tricky little control knobs on the strobes.

Back on the surface the gloves proved invaluable when stripping down my dive-gear, unscrewing the DIN wheel on my regs and wrestling with the tight synch-clamp on my BC.

I was also able move my tanks and perform other hazardous tasks without abrasion or injury to my delicate digits.

The gloves dried quickly when left out in the sun, and didn't stiffen in the process.



MacWet Micromesh short-cuff gloves in black.

Conclusion

If, like me, you see a place for warmwater gloves in your dive-bag, the MacWet versions, although not designed specifically for divers, worked extremely well, both under water and topside.

They could be invaluable attire when attending controversial shark-feed dives, by keeping your hands from looking like the fish bait, and by preventing those little cuts, nicks and stings we all suffer during our dive activities they could prevent infections too.

The gloves have proved useful for all-round use and have excelled in the wet. The added bonus is that they're machine-washable. ■

SPECS

PRICES ›› **Micromesh £27.99, Climatec £29.99**
SIZES ›› **14**
LENGTH ›› **Long and short cuff**
COLOURS ›› **Brown, black, green and navy, plus white and black & white in the Micromesh versions.**
CONTACT ›› **www.macwet.com**
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NEW BUT UNTESTED

The latest kit to hit the dive shops

APD Training Surface Marker Buoy

Responding to requests from diving instructors, we're told, Cornwall-based Ambient Pressure Diving has produced a range of SMBs designed specifically for deployment training. The APD Training SMB is identical in design to the rest of the company's popular self-sealing SMB range, except that it has a reduced capacity of 2 litres. This allows trainees to deploy the buoy several times without depleting their gas supply. Three models are available, one for inflation via a regulator or second-stage air source, the second with APD's own Easifil adaptor for inflation via a low-pressure feed hose, and the third with a 0.1-litre DIN cylinder. The SMBs are priced at £32, £52 and £108 respectively.

www.apdiving.com





Squale 2002 Dive Watch

Italian family watchmaker Squale has added 2002 models to its range of diver timepieces. It has a Swiss self-winding ETA 2824-2 movement behind a 3.5mm-thick sapphire crystal face set in a 43mm stainless-steel case with a snap-on rotary bezel. A screw-down back and winder with double gasket seals gives it a depth-rating of 1000m. Straps are of Italian-made rubber and can be matched to the face and bezel colour. Milanese mesh-steel bracelets are also available. The 2002 models pictured are priced at £975.

www.pageandcooper.com

Northern Diver Voyager Luggage

Expanding its Voyager range of diving luggage, Northern Diver has released the Voyager Maxi Quest bag. Featuring a clamshell design, it is constructed from heavy-duty Ripstop nylon and has two removable zipped and cushioned compartments offering a total capacity of 139 litres. The bag also offers a larger fin-pocket than its predecessor, wheels and a retractable pulling handle. It weighs in at 6.1kg. Also available in the new range is the Voyager Lightweight Holdall with a capacity of 136 litres and weighing 3.8kg. Expect to pay £95 for the Maxi Quest and £75 for the Lightweight Holdall.

www.ndiver.com



Fourth Element Arctic Expedition Undersuit

Fourth Element says it has brought its knowledge of performance fabrics and biomapped design together to create a new undersuit in the Expedition series. Using strategically placed additional layers of high-density fleece, wind and waterproof fabrics, the addition of biomapping technology maximises thermal protection while minimising bulk. The Arctic Expedition is available in gender-specific two-piece and men's one-piece versions in sizes from S to 3XL and 6/8 to 20/22, with both standard and short leg lengths. All versions are priced at £279 and supplied with a free Fourth Element DrySac.

www.fourthelement.com





Bristol Channel Diving Deco Dive Planning Decals ▲▲▲▲

Bristol Channel Diving Services has developed and released traffic-light colour-coded self-adhesive stickers designed to enable best practice in dive-planning for open-circuit technical divers. It says that by using them dive status can be easily identified, with the information recorded in a logical and accessible format suitable for regular diving as well as training scenarios. The labels are varnished and durable, says the maker, and they can be overwritten using a waterproof marker, then wiped clean after use with a Magic Sponge. Sized to fit standard flip slates as shown, they cost £3 per sheet.

www.deco-decals.com

Big Blue AL-1000 XWP GoPro System ▼▼▼▼

Big Blue's latest set-up for the GoPro camera system consists of a mounting tray, two double-ball clips, two YS-type ball-mounts and two Big Blue Al-1000 XWP video lights. The lights have an output of 1000 lumens with a beam angle of 120° at a colour temperature of 6500 Kelvin, and are powered by rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. The system is priced at £499 (excluding the camera), or the lights can be bought separately for £150 each.

www.liquidsports.co.uk





Fantasea G7X Camera Housing ◀◀◀◀

This housing for the latest Canon Powershot G7X compact camera is shock-resistant and has a depth rating of 60m. Made from durable injection-moulded polycarbonate, it is said to provide full access to all essential camera functions. Additional features include a double O-ring seal, mounts for lighting accessories, a removable flash-diffuser and fibre-optic cable-connector. The G7X comes with a moisture detector, port cover and hand-strap. The price is US $625 for the housing and $1400 for the housing and camera bundle.

www.underwater-housing.co.uk

BIG MASK TASK



There are some interesting new trends in diver facewear, and we look them squarely in the eye in our latest group test

NIGEL WADE

NEXT ISSUE

AFLOAT IN GALAPAGOS
Does liveaboard diving get much more exciting?

CLEAR RUN
A skydiver feels at home in Iceland's Silfra fissure

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It's Caribbean island diving but rarely predictable

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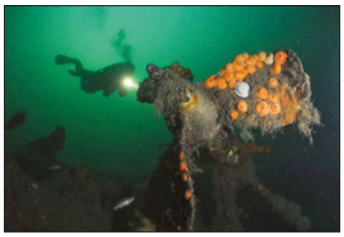
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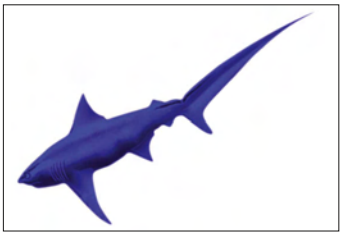
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Lth	30m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

CARIBBEAN – St. Maarten & St. Kitts
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Pax	18	Elec	110V
Cab	9	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	35.1m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

COCOS IS. – Puntarenas, Costa Rica
TSP DWw AF STW
Argo
www.underseahunter.com



Pax	16	Elec	110V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	39m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	Y

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC – Silver Bank
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Pax	20	Elec	110V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37.8m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh & Hurghada
CT
South Moon
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Pax	20	Elec	220V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	27m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh
HD
VIP One
www.vipone.com



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Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	29.5m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

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S/Y Fiji Siren
www.worldwidediveandsail.com



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Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

GALAPAGOS
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Humboldt Explorer
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Cab	8	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	32.3m	Ntx	Y
Hull		CCR	N

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STW A DWw DQ AF
Carpe Vita Explorer
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Pax	20	Elec	240V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	38.2m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	N

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Pax	14	Elec	220V
Cab	7	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	30m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

MALDIVES – Malé
STW
M.V. Sea Spirit
www.scubascuba.com



Pax	12	Elec	220V
Cab	6	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	26m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

MICRONESIA – Truk Lagoon
DQ UD DWw STW
M.V. Odyssey
www.trukodyssey.com



Pax	16	Elec	220v,110v
Cab	9	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	38.2m	Ntx	Y
Hull	Steel	CCR	Y

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CT DWw AF DQ
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Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	34m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

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Ocean Hunter Palau
www.oceanhunter.com



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Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	31m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	Y

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Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

PHILIPPINES
AF CT DWw RD UD DQ STW
S/Y Philippine Siren
www.worldwidediveandsail.com



Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

THAILAND & INDONESIA
M.V. Queen Scuba
www.queenscuba.com



Pax	21	Elec	220V
Cab	9	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	28m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	N

TURKS & CAICOS
A DWw DQ
Turks & Caicos Explorer II
www.explorerventures.com



Pax	20	Elec	110V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37.8m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

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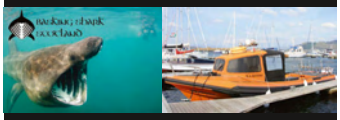
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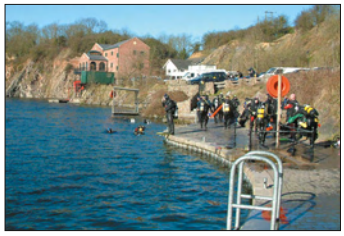
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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

AGGRESSOR FLEET	15	MALTAQUA	56
ALIWAL DIVE CENTRE	40	MARES	9
APEKS MARINE	20/21	OONASDIVERS	79
AQUA-FIRMA	12	OTTER DRYSUITS	87
ATLANTIS PHILIPPINES	71	PRODIVERS MALDIVES	6
BARE	52	PROFESSIONAL DIVING ACADEMY	20
BEAVER SPORTS	30	RED SEA DIVING COLLEGE	55
BLUE O TWO (PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOPS)	47	REGALDIVE (RED SEA)	15
BLUE O TWO (SIREN FLEET)	68	REGALDIVE (WORLDWIDE)	56
CAMEL DIVE CLUB	52	SCUBA TRAVEL (MALDIVES)	3
CAMERAS UNDERWATER	47	SCUBA TRAVEL	71
CARIBBEAN FUN TRAVEL	20	SCUBAPRO	4
DANCER FLEET	15	SEA & SEA (DIVE RITE)	62
DIVE WORLDWIDE	68	SEA & SEA (PINNACLE)	68
DIVER APP	74	SEA & SEA (UNDERWATER KINETICS)	15
DIVER SUBSCRIPTIONS:		SEA & SEA (YS-03 STROBE)	40
MAGAZINE ONLY	91	SIMPLY SCUBA	43/87
OVERSEAS	74	SUB AQUA PRODUCTS	87
RUCKSACK	93	SUUNTO DIVING UK	100
TORCH	93	SWAHILI DIVERS	62
WATCH	97	THE SCUBA PLACE	2
EGYPTIAN TOURIST AUTHORITY	64/65	TRUK ODYSSEY	56
EXPOSURE MARINE	22	TUSA	24
FISHINFOCUS	40	TYPHOON	35
FLIPPERS N FINS	40	WAKATOBI DIVE RESORT	7
FOURTH ELEMENT	99	WESTFIELD INSURANCE	94/95
MALDIVES BOAT CLUB	79		

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Sex with dolphins – and we're all to blame

It's a love that normally dare not speak its name, but a new book and film forces us to consider this taboo issue, says TIM ECOTT, who wonders if it isn't also a cry for help for cetaceans in captivity

MAKING LOVE TO A DOLPHIN is a psychic experience," according to Malcolm Brenner. Explaining the way his sexual relationship with a captive cetacean in Florida developed over a period of several months, he said, "I never actively encouraged 'Dolly the Dolphin' in any way. I never offered her any fish."

Brenner's relationship with Dolly is the subject of *Dolphin Lover*, a documentary which caused a stir at last month's Slamdance Film Festival in Utah. Slamdance aims to provide an alternative to the rather more traditional offerings at Robert Redford's better known Sundance Festival.

Mr Brenner has also written a novel based on his experiences, luridly entitled *Wet Goddess*. Animal rights groups have condemned Brenner's actions, while dolphin experts have avoided being drawn into commenting on the rights and wrongs of his relationship.

His erotic encounters took place at Florida Land, a now-defunct theme park, in the 1970s. Florida Land "attractions" included a trained chimpanzee offering herring to the dolphins as a reward for acrobatic displays. All good old-fashioned fun.

Now 61, Brenner believes he can finally talk freely about his relationship with Dolly. He has tried to steer interviews away from the prurient side of the human-dolphin interaction, and stressed that this was a one-off relationship with another species.

His claim is slightly compromised by his admission that he had a failed attempt at sex with a pet poodle while he was a schoolboy. And, although his fling with Dolly was 40 years ago, and predates two "human" marriages, Brenner says he would consider another such dolphin relationship.

"Even at the time, though I knew people would question my actions, I couldn't figure out what was wrong with it," he says.

MANY ETHICISTS WOULD DISAGREE. Sex with anyone or anything deemed to be of unequal ability to consent, whether it's a child, someone with emotional disabilities or indeed, another species, is considered wrong. In the Middle Ages bestiality was a hanging offence, and the hapless animal victims were usually executed in front of their human co-accused on the gallows.

Today there is a *Carry On*-type of humour attached to the subject on those rare occasions when it reaches the mainstream media.

Only this year Alan Barnfield, a 44-year-old man from Doncaster, was arrested and sentenced to four years for "outraging public decency" near Sheffield. When arrested, the police said he was "sweating copiously and smelling strongly of horses".

Last summer more court-room titters were provoked during the trial of 61-year-old Paul Lovell, who was reported to police for pursuing congress with cows and sheep near to Tottenham Hotspur's training ground.

He received a suspended sentence, partly because his bovine victims had escaped unscathed. There's clearly more of this human-animal interaction out there than we think.



NIGEL WADE

In 1991 Alan Cooper was acquitted in Northumberland of sexual contact with a wild dolphin nicknamed Freddie. No evidence was found that he had done anything remotely wrong.

Cooper now campaigns to end what he terms "animal slavery". A recent BBC documentary revealed that Margaret Howe Lovatt indulged sexual advances from a male dolphin during NASA-sponsored experiments in the 1960s.

And in 2005 Sharon Tendler, 41, conducted a wedding ceremony with a 35-year-old male dolphin called Cindy in Eilat. That relationship, however, was entirely platonic.

I have met many dolphins in the wild, and under captive conditions, both under water and at the surface. Having sex with them has never crossed my mind, and it is not something I would advocate.

However, something struck me in Malcolm Brenner's case that bears hearing out. "People get upset with me", he says, "because they say they love dolphins. But it's our love for dolphins that results in hundreds of them being kept in captivity, often under intolerable conditions.

"We know they are sentient, intelligent creatures, and yet we allow them to be kept for our amusement. When it's clearly wrong."

WITH MORE THAN 2000 CAPTIVE dolphins in the USA alone, and more in Europe and the Far East, there is a growing call for higher mammals – especially marine species – to be given some kind of legal recognition to prevent them being exploited.

Activists say they should be recognised as non-human persons, and the American actress Robbyne Kaamil recently compared the fate of a female orca (the largest dolphin species) named Lolita to that of her own ancestors who were brought to America as slaves. Lolita, who is more than 6m long, has been kept in solitary in a tank at Miami Seaquarium since 1970.

A substantial wave of public opinion was generated following the release of the 2013 film *Blackfish*, highlighting the immorality of using performing orcas at Florida's massively popular SeaWorld attraction.

In the same year, India's Ministry of Environment ruled against the establishment of dolphinariums on the grounds that cetaceans are highly intelligent and sensitive and should have the status of "non-human persons".

And in the USA the Non Human Rights Project campaigns specifically on behalf of great apes, cetaceans and elephants on that basis.

I wonder if by appearing on screen in *Dolphin Lover*, and writing his "interspecies romance novel", Malcolm Brenner has made a very brave decision. He has exposed himself to ridicule and vilification because he admits having sex with Dolly. But he's using his notoriety to publicise the rational belief that captive marine mammals are unhappy.

He believes that Dolly died some months after their affair because she was lonely and depressed.

The problem with Brenner's theory is that we can never know what animals are thinking or feeling with any certainty. In the 1920s the naturalist Henry Beston wrote that other species "are not brethren, and not underlings, they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time".

Odd he may be, but Brenner has put that idea to the test. And made us question if we can describe any relationships with animals under the category of "love". If we really love them, shouldn't we set them free?

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